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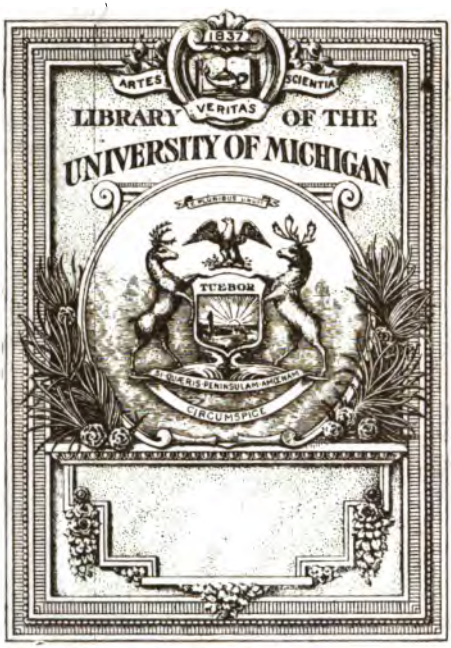
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When The Century was New

A Novel

By

Charles Conrad Abbott, M.D.

Philadelphia
J. B. Lippincott Company
MDCCCXCVII

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THIS STORY

OF

OLD NOTTINGHAM,

WHEN THE CENTURY WAS NEW,

IS

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

TO

THE MEMORY

OF

MY MOTHER.

C. C. A.

THREE BEECHES, January, 1897.

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The Horse-Head Inn

Stand far enough away, and the old oak has a smooth bark. So, it occurred to me, it is with an old tavern about to be demolished. The rude features of the colonial inn, that all men plainly saw in an earlier century, are now softened by the intervening light of one hundred and thirty-four years, and to all eyes the old house is beautiful in this the day of its passing away. A group of men with tools of destruction stood before the building as I passed by, and I knew what their presence meant. I changed my plans for the day, and can boast of being the last man who sat upon the hickory slab that did duty as a seat on the porch. Oak, hickory, and yellow pine,—these three woods only had been used in the construction of this house, and every one was as hard as iron and as smooth as ivory.

Much is sometimes gained by talking learnedly to an unlettered crowd. Indeed, you have but to tell the world, with a straight face, that two and two make five, and they will believe it. I impressed not only the workmen but the landlord also, and it became a foregone conclusion that the fruits of any discovery should be mine. So I lingered all that day happy, hopeful, and hungry. The removal of the porch revealed nothing but a Nova Cæsarea penny coined in New Jersey in 1787. This was given up without reluctance, being but a penny; but what if somewhere a pot of gold should be found! I became uneasy, and talked learnedly of numismatics. Nothing more was found, the penny was forgotten, and the day closed with it alone to reward my patience. At seven A. M. the day following the main building was attacked, commencing at the roof. No treasure had ever been tucked between the shingles, and when the huge oak rafters were bared to the sun, the flood of light that swept over the long-darkened attic revealed nothing startling.

Of course there were the discarded spinning-wheel and broken chairs and the remains of a claw-footed table; but no old books, nor any bull-hide trunk studded with brass tacks. I was bitterly disappointed. Long-current stories of the early days of the Horse-Head Inn were then nothing but stories told to amuse children, but by them repeated to a third generation as sober truth. Is such the beginning of much that we now call history?

But one other chance of discovery remained. In the story was a "ha'nted" chamber, as my neighbors knew it. It was the end room, and had the chimney for a half of one of its walls, and a little corner cupboard or closet, a quaint feature strangely enough omitted from modern dwellings. The room being haunted, it was no longer used. Its history seemed somehow always to reach the guests before they reached the house; the stage-driver, presumably, being responsible for this. When this room was reached by the men who were armed with pick and axe (and they looked as if they had demanded

stout weapons to keep off the ghosts), there was little difference to be noticed between it and the other rooms. The little closet had been nailed up, and the door hidden by wall-paper. I was allowed to lead now, and with what expectant hands I pried open that little door! Within were two empty shelves. Shaking them, half in rage, the lower one moved from its place, and a dark, narrow hole was dimly visible. Thrusting my arm full length in this, I drew out a bit of parchment. Yellow, brittle, and nibbled about its edges, it was at least a relic, if a sorry one, and then there were ink-marks to be deciphered. This was no difficult task. "*This Indent*," in bold script, was plainly to be seen, but all else had faded to mere dots and broken lines. The parchment had been an old deed, but for what lands? With the silliness of the average curiosity-hunter I placed the scrap in my pocket-book.

The work of demolition proceeded, and again a pause as the chimney was laid bare. Another piece of parchment had lodged, acted as a trap-door or valve, and beneath

it were the bones of many bats. Here, then, was the origin of the story that the room was haunted. Imprisoned bats had been the ghost that was heard; and when we hear strange noises in the night, fancy is all too ready to paint the portrait of the uncanny creature making them. What better material for a ghost than flickering moonlight and a fluttering bat? "But why had an old deed been hidden?" was asked by one by-stander; and why the sudden disappearance of a stranger who was sought by others for many weeks and then given up for dead? "There was strange doin's about that time, for father remembered them," one old man remarked, and my bat theory was not accepted by the people present.

The old Horse-Head Inn was a commonplace affair after all, and I went about my business; but rumor of discovery soon overtook me. When the cellar was reached,—I am repeating hearsay,—a passage was found from one of its walls to a long-abandoned well. It was but a few feet long, and so narrow that a person could only with diffi-

culty crawl through it. Curiosity led to its thorough examination, and the old well, that most people had forgotten, was found to be its termination. Why the passage was made no one could tell, but it was built when the tavern cellar was dug, as the masonry showed. When uncovered, the well was found half filled with rubbish several feet above the water-line, and on the very top of all was a human skeleton. Not a trace of clothing was discovered. Evidently a naked body had been hidden here many years ago.

I was a day too late, but saw a trace of the passage-way and the rubbish in the well. But where was the skeleton? No one seemed to know or to be willing to tell, but the truth came out at last, and the reinterred bones were exhumed on the sly. For three days the old folks had been delighted that I had been snubbed for "showin' my larnin' a little too free." "These fellers don't know it all," chuckled old Philip Flint; "I ain't lived to be up'ards o' seventy for nothin'!" But when I came to question the old man pretty closely, he had not a word to say, and

I was careful not to tell him what I knew. It was all mystery and a mere echo of what other people had fancied because a lodger had gone off in the night without seeing the landlord. I told Philip this, and he could or would say nothing more than that it was a free country and people could think what they pleased, adding, "Only don't think you can ride over everybody 'cause they didn't go to college. You ain't as old as some other folks, and every year's a bit of a school-teacher."

Either Philip was a good actor or a fool, I could not tell which; but I was sure of my ground. Unwrapping a bundle I had with me, I said, "Philip, do you think it likely that the missing man you tell us about went on four legs and had teeth half as long as your thumb? And was his head shaped like this?" And I showed him the skull of a bear. The old man looked at me with an indescribable expression, muttered a few words that I could not hear distinctly, and turned away. I was right, after all.

Is this brushing away of the pleasant mystery and myth that lingers about old

places profitable? Why not let the new building, with its new surroundings of gaudy exotic shrubs and patent windmill, remain as the hideous monument of what never existed,—the tavern wherein a murder was committed? The Horse-Head Inn had been a place of note in the days of stages and private coaches. There had many a man of prominence in his day stopped for a meal or to lodge. There had gathered the neighbors when the Revolution was in progress, and the politics of the beginning of the century had been discussed in the old bar-room and on the porch. Why not let the truth be seasoned with tales of murder and mystery? It could do no harm. I had taken away from the neighborhood a positive charm in bringing the truth to light. It was a foolish thing to do; and when I last passed by, the monotone of the tall pines, the cawing of crows, and the weird cry of the night-heron had in a measure lost their charm, for these solemn sounds fit better with the ghosts of our fancy than with the facts of over-zealous truth.

II

FROM a cluttered corner of an out-house loft, into which I crept cautiously,—for the floor was rotten and the old building generally unsafe,—I drew a little wooden trunk with bulging lid, covered with spotted cowskin and studded with brass nails. Over all was thickly spread the dust of ages and, as a crowning glory, cobwebs. How the silly crowd that gathers on every unusual occasion gaped and grew wise as the trunk was opened! I forced the scarcely restraining lock and found a moth-eaten mass that once was woollen clothing. A pewter button here and there was readily recognized as the pattern common in our grandfathers' days; and so, too, was a parchment deed at the very bottom of the trunk. On the back of this document was drawn, in bright-red ink, a map of the land described in the text, and the metes and bounds mentioned were made clear by the dots and double crosses referring to a house, a road, and a bridge. But one of the parties con-

cerned in the buying and selling was known by name, but I was not to be allowed to form my own conclusions, even now, when I was on private property, and the trunk was owned by a neighbor who had placed it in my care for examination. The old tavern crowd, or some of them, had followed me, perhaps to have the laugh on me again. I knew very well that those who assume to be fully posted on every subject are sure to be poor authorities, but old Philip Flint thought otherwise. All bespectacled and assuming, he was about to take the deed from my hands, when I said, "You can have the trunk, and I'll keep this," and left Philip muttering to himself and laughed at by the by-standers.

Meanwhile, I deciphered the map and read the deed where legible, and found that it referred to a part of the present barrens and weedy meadow-tracts that dot, like little islands, the great long, narrow, and still largely unreclaimed tract of Bear Swamp. The deed was not very old, having been drawn in 1754, and bore no evidence of ever

having been recorded. The one prominent feature of the map was, that on it were indicated a road, a bridge, and a dwelling no longer in existence. The house was destroyed or abandoned some time after the Revolution, and the old bridle-path gave way to a new thoroughfare in 1790 or earlier, as the county records show. Here, then, I thought, was a chance for discovery and possible adventure. Avoiding old Flint as a pestilence, I set about preparing for a tramp through Bear Swamp. It is well in all such cases to be your own adviser. To be twitted about the outcome of a wild-goose chase is never pleasant, and the most considerate of people cannot always refrain from vaguely hinting at the wrong time.

It was an early hour of a superb summer morning when I started,—sunny above, leafy about, and with a dash of October sparkle in the open bits, where low bushes had replaced the ancient forest. With a compass only for my guide, I was a little disheartened to find that a mile or more of high-bush huckleberry was to be pushed through, and

for what? Snakes and snapping-turtles! The old road ought to be here, but it was not traceable. Turn back? No. How much time is crowded in the critical moment! I pushed on for some ten minutes longer, and then a narrow line of light showed straight away through the trees. The clearing made so many years ago had not yet been completely obliterated. There was still a break, —a line over which no tree had ventured. In my many aimless journeys through these woods I had never noticed this before, nor probably had any of my neighbors seen it; they, like myself, having no suspicion of its existence. I searched the ground carefully for traces of wagon travel; there were none, but the ground was different from that adjoining it: it was more compact and pebbly. I looked only where I stepped, in search of relics, and, of course, found nothing. The birds looked down upon me and announced my coming to their neighbors in the bush, and scores, it seemed, of wagtails, jays, and chewinks peered at me with far more curiosity than fear, and scolded without measure.

Pausing, after a time, to consult the map, it was found that the creek should be near by, also the house and bridge, which were near each other. Scarcely a hundred paces more brought a change of scene. A dense growth of button-bushes suggested flowing water, and there I found it. At first glance the water seemed a mere rain-pool, ringed and rippled only by the startled frogs. A little pollen thrown upon the surface of the seemingly still water began slowly to move in one direction, and the fact of the existence of a current was made evident. But where had been the bridge? Much cautious wading and more probing were required, but the posts were found at last, and the one-time site of the little bridge determined. This was a case where tree-stumps could not be fancied as pilings, their relative positions proving that. So far I had been successful. A forgotten road, a forgotten bridge,—so much game bagged; and now what of the house? Then the sad thought came to me: was all this a real discovery? Would not every neighbor declare he had known this

much all his days? The real discovery of the day was that I was very tired, and, it being near noon, by the sun, I crawled to higher and drier ground.

I crawled in the right direction. The little grassy knoll was a delight. Except as it faced the old road, it was walled in by viscous azalea, now at the very height of its blooming. The Milky Way was never more crowded with stars than this little glade with flowers. As the spot was more closely scrutinized, it lost its wildness. There still lingered about it an unmistakable door-yard look. And now the truth slowly dawned upon my sluggish wits: this was the site of the old house. It could not have been more plain had the house been standing. Traces of paths were still visible: narrow depressions in the sod, like many an existing trace of an Indian trail, in which no foot has trod for more than two centuries. There was, too, a slight depression suggestive of a cellar, and probing proved the existence of a foundation wall and a flat slab that had been a door-step. From this the soil was removed,

and its worn, half-polished surface told a pretty story. One faintly indicated path led to the azaleas, and, following this, I found a spring. There was but little surface indication, but enough to warrant my tearing up the sod, and then were revealed the ends of the staves of a little barrel that had been sunk in the ground. Removing the sand that had slowly sifted in and replaced the water, the staves slowly bended forward and sank into the little pool that had formed.

And now let me ask, Why is it that we are so often seized with a sudden impulse to do some apparently foolish act? In front of the little spring, as you approach it by the path, was a flat stone. I had been kneeling upon it while at work, and was now forced, I will say, to lift it from its bed. I did so, and found an old knife. It was a rude affair. The blade had been long and broad, but was now rusted away until it was a mere shell of little scales and traces of shining metal. The handle was a short section of buckthorn, with a broad brass ring at the end. Rusty and ragged though it was, enough was left

to suggest many a thrilling adventure,—hunting incidents when this was Bear Swamp in something more than name, and murder possibly, for the knife had evidently been hidden and not lost. Could old Philip Flint be right?

I turned homeward, and the path proved better defined than when I came. It was much worse in fancy than in fact, as usual, when I started on my goalless journey. I knew who had built the one-time house,—this the old deed told me,—and slowly stories of the old hunter, Mark Watson, came back to me; but I could recall nothing that suggested any wrongful act. So ran my thoughts as I at last reached the open country, and, while it was yet day, passed the little cottage of old Philip Flint. "Whar ye been?" the crabbed fellow snarled, when I was within hailing distance. "Did you ever hear of Mark Watson?" was the cross-question. "'Course. He was the old hunter back here who murd—I mean was murdered, so pop used to say, and——" "Well," I called back, cutting Philip short, "I've been

along an old road you never heard of, and here is the old hunter's knife," and I held it up triumphantly. "Well, I'll be clawed by a cat if you don't beat the bugs!" exclaimed Philip. With a smile, the bug-beater passed on.

III

"I SAY, Charles, sometimes there's credit due to a fool, tho' he mayn't get it."

"What the mischief are you driving at?" I asked, with some impatience, for I was in no humor to listen to Flint's chaffing or half-drunken chatter, whichever it was. He had already frightened a thrush that had been singing, and this was an occurrence I could never patiently brook.

"Come now, don't be so crusty, and I'm old enough to be treated a little respectable."

"A little respectful, you mean, I suppose. And now what is it you've got on your mind?"

Philip sat down near me, choosing an out-reaching root of an old oak for his seat, and with his cane pushed into the turf, he rested his chin upon his hands, as they grasped the

stout stick's crooked handle. He was as doubled up as a Peruvian mummy, and not unlike one in appearance. When I expected him to commence his drowsy complaint, as I supposed it would prove, he sent a long narrow stream of tobacco juice into the brook that rippled by, and watched the soiled surface of the clear waters until it was out of sight. "Everything don't pass out o' sight and out o' mind like that, not by a long shot," he muttered to himself; and then turning towards me a little, so that he could see my face, he said at last, "Charles, you ha'n't furgotten the tearin' down of old Hoss-Head, have you?"

"No."

"And you ha'n't furgotten gettin' the skull o' the bear from the corner of the old garden?"

"No."

"And you ha'n't furgotten how you grinned when you got the best o' me on that p'int?"

"No."

"And so you're not ready to hear that you climbed up the wrong tree, eh?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, impatiently.

"Why, I didn't care to have the p'tic'lars knowed all over about the Hoss-Head murder while I was livin', tho' I'd nothin' to do with it, and you just dug in the wrong place. You knowed Ben South kep' a tame b'ar what died more 'n a year ago, and you dug up the critter's bones. You see, I tipped the boys the wink, and they put you on the wrong track. You went wild like a puppy that don't know chicken from pheasant. Them was real man's bones in the old well, and I can prove it. I only made b'lieve I was mad when you held up the b'ar's head, for don't you s'pose I knowed the difference? Seen the snags in my own mouth too often not to know a b'ar's tooth. Fur once you 'pended too much on your book-l'arnin', and took a step too fur, takin' me fur a downright, fool."

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Cinders and ashes, man, ain't it enough?"

exclaimed Philip, with astonishment, thinking he had demolished me, as was the case, but I did not show it.

"It is not enough," I said, finally, "if you've got more to tell." He eyed me very closely while I spoke, and I saw he realized how interested I really was.

"There's nothin' more 'n this. If you'll go 'long, on the full o' the moon, I'll let you dig up the real bones and satisfy yourself."

I stood for more than a minute looking down at the ground and wondering how much attention I might pay to his story. It might be all true or all a hoax, and yet I was not affected by what he said as I had always been before. Philip did not seem to be quite the same as in times past, and I concluded to take up with him.

"Why wait till the moon's full?" I asked.

"Can't you wait? Anyhow, you'll have to. I ain't takin' no risks with that murdered man's spook. Spooks hang around in the dark, I've a notion, but a full moon's too much for 'em."

"That's all rot, Philip. Let's go to-night."

"Not a step fur me. You can say what you pleases, but I've heard and seen too many spooks not to know they're real, and it don't hurt to happen on the safe side even when there's no danger."

I saw there was no chance of moving the old man; so I told him that I would go with him, and added, "See here, Flint, what's the good of our sort of quarrelling all the time? Let's stop it."

"Never was any use, and it's been all on your side; but never mind that. Meet me at the new 'Hoss-Head,' the night the moon's full, kind o' by accident like, and we'll go dig 'em up."

I had but a week to wait. Then, when the moon was well up, I looked into the tavern's bar-room, and, seeing Philip, did not enter, but closed the door again and stood on the long porch outside. In a few moments the old man appeared. To throw off all suspicion, he went in one direction and I in another, he having previously whispered,

"Make a half-circle 'round the buildin's, a field and a half wide." I jumped the fence and crossed the second field to the eastward: he did the same in the opposite direction, and the result was our meeting by a lone chestnut in mid-field, where we were not likely to be molested. It was a nicely planned scheme to throw any possible follower off our track, and here, by a tree well known because of its size, I stood face to face with Philip Flint, alone and at night, for the first time in my life. The past, with its innumerable breaches of that decent respect I was bound to show the old man and never had, came very vividly before me, and I wondered if this meeting had been planned by him to afford an opportunity for revenge. Had he friends hidden near by, in the weedy angles of the worm-fence? As Philip was old and I active, I grew calm again after a brief but tumultuous rush of wild imaginings.

"Here, Charles, between them out-stickin' roots, you'll find the dirt loose-like, as tho' squirrels 'd been buryin' nuts. But never mind, I'm young enough to do it. You

look on and I'll bring the bones to light,—or to dark, for the moon's gone under."

In the dim light, for the clouds were thin, I could plainly see the outlines of old Philip as he moved the loose soil rapidly to one side. Very soon he handed me a round object, held carefully in both his hands. A flicker of moonlight struggled through the broken clouds at the moment, and there it was, as Philip had said, a human skull.

"Do you see the clean cut to one side, clean through the bone, and are you satisfied now?" he asked.

"It's a human skull, that's sure," I replied.

"It's a man's skull, and here's the rest o' the bones, if you want to see 'em, and what's more, it's the head and bones o' him as was murdered at the Hoss-Head," Philip said in very earnest tones, but so faintly spoken I could hardly distinguish his words. He was either much frightened or excited, I could not tell which; "and now on your word o' honor, you won't tell," he whispered, as he put the skull back in the ground.

"You have it, Philip," I replied, and then

it flashed across me that he might confess to being the murderer. But no; I remembered he was but a mere child when the crime was committed, and I did not recall my words. Very quickly the ground was again levelled and the sod and moss replaced so as to appear as if undisturbed, and then Philip leaned against the huge trunk of the tree to rest. I was about to leave him and go home when he remarked, "Just hold on a minute, and let me tell you a bit more. There'll never be a better chance. It was just this way. I was a little chap then, but big enough to take in what folks was sayin'. That night o' the murder pop and mammy were bendin' over the fire tryin' to keep warm, when I waked up, after bein' asleep on the floor, front o' mammy. Just as I did, I heard pop say, 'I was too skeert to move till he'd been gone long enough to get to the river, and he kind o' mumbled somethin' about goin' there.' This sort o' roused me, but I didn't move much, and when pop said 'Phil,' I kep' still like and he went on talkin', thinkin' I'd gone to sleep again. He said, 'The feller

wasn't drunk, but so 'cited like he couldn't keep from talkin', and so didn't hear me, for I sort o' breathed loud and started like, sittin' on t'other side o' the old chestnut. His voice sounded nat'ral like, and I 'spicioned it was Mark Watson, but couldn't make out. "I didn't do wrong in killin' him, but, right or wrong, I couldn't help it when he told me the whole truth. To 'a' robbed me o' property would 'a' been different, but to do what he did was too much for me. I couldn't help it." And then he got up and went towards Trenton, and I lost him in the dark. As I said afore, I waited till he got clear off, and I came home 'bout as quick as I knowed how.'

"'And do you keep yer mouth shet, Phil Flint, or you'll get in a muss,' said mammy. And then she took me by the ear, and I waked up for real, actin' silly like, so she 'spicioned nothin'! There was a big noise some time after, when the murdered man was missed, but the tavern folks 'lowed he went off in the night without reckonin' with 'em, and nothin' showed to the con-

trary, and nobody but us folks knowed how it was. I told pop all about it, one day 'fore he died, and he was sort o' struck dumb, but I swored I'd never said nothin' and wouldn't. He sort o' cooled down and then argyed, as he did a'terwards to mammy and me often, that it would 'a' been no use. It wouldn't 'a' brought the man back to life, and it wasn't a real murder anyway. He didn't mean to kill him. It's most furgotten now, but I sort o' wanted you to know about it somehow 'fore I died, and now you do, and I've your word o' honor you'll keep shet up till I'm gone."

"All right on that score, Philip; but you would have done better a great deal, or your father would, to have told the whole story," I remarked.

"Pop couldn't. He always 'spicioned who the man was as did it, as I told you, but he couldn't swear to it. You see pop was about half drunk at the time, and the skeer of it didn't sober him quick enough to be sure on that p'int. He 'lowed to me, most the last thing 'fore he died, who he thought

did it, and I've kep' still ever since, and let the thing grow hazy like, till you showed me the old knife you found in the swamp road."

"Was that the knife the man was killed with?" I asked.

"Well, I take it that's the knife as did the job."

"And Mark Watson was the murderer," I added, taking up Philip's words.

"Sh! not so loud. You're right, I guess. When you showed it I said, 'Pop 'lowed Mark was murdered,' but I sort o' fumbled my words, for I came near sayin', 'Mark was him as done it,' and I didn't want to let on as I thought that. I'd been thinkin' it all over that very day, and you sort o' knocked me silly, sayin' what you did, sudden like, and showin' that old knife as you did."

"One thing more, Philip: who was the man murdered?" I asked.

"Some feller from Phil'delphy, so people said who came to look for him," Philip replied.

"But what was his name?" I asked.

"I never heerd as I know," said Philip, with a tone that showed he wanted to drop the subject and go home.

"One thing more Philip: what became of Mark?"

"Oh, he cleared out o' course, same time, and nobody ever knowed."

It is not strange that, as I walked home, I very fully discussed in my own mind the events of the past days. It was evident that I had learned all that I could from Philip, and no one living could tell me more. But I was not satisfied. Analyzing the evidence, the man from Philadelphia might have murdered Mark instead of being murdered by him, and what was the trouble about? After so many years it is useless to bring the subject again to notice. The mystery had not been solved or kept a secret at the time. Every person directly or indirectly associated with the affair except Philip was dead, and he could not or would not divulge another particular; and yet I was not satis-

fied. Murder will not always out, that is very certain, and why should it, when nothing can be gained by discovering the truth? I had no desire to prove some one's grandfather a murderer, and determined to keep my own counsel if I ever discovered further particulars. There would be no criminality on my part, and—— but I had reached home by this time, and my thoughts were diverted to another channel. Yet not for long. A re-examination of the site of Mark Watson's cabin seemed called for, and, throwing everybody off the scent, I spent two days and a night in the Bear Swamp. I trenched where the cellar had been and searched about the little spring. I overturned many a flat stone, and the right ones did not escape me. I traced one little mound and uncovered it. It was not unlike the Indian stone graves around the Water Gap that I have rifled. This was not such a receptacle, but one for keeping milk and meat sweet and away from flies, such as were common in the country before the days of ice-houses. I pulled this one

apart stone by stone when the earth was removed, and all the while with such perfect coolness and confidence that I felt then, and think now, that Mark Watson's ghost was at my elbow. Some papers that he valued he had concealed here, because he was so frequently absent, and if the stranger came here after Mark's murder at the Horse-Head, or Mark, having murdered the stranger, had come home before departing for regions unknown, in either case, as it now proves, the little subterranean provision cellar was overlooked, and to-day the truth, or some of it, comes to light. Whoever Mark Watson was, he was not an unlettered trapper of mink and otter, or he never would have left on record,—

"I do not anticipate that any one will dispute that the under dog is unpopular. The man who expressed genuine sympathy for this forlorn creature has never been in evidence; the rare expressions of such a character being heretofore traceable to mendacity, and such is likely to be the result in the

future of any investigation, if any one look seriously into the matter. No one, I repeat, ever did, now does, or can like the under dog. Because he is under is sufficient for utter condemnation; still the under dog continues to live, and how readily he explains defeat! Nobody cares; nobody listens, or, idly listening, nobody believes. The bark of the upper dog may mean a bite, so the world gives ear; the voice of the under dog is but the breaking of the silence. If heard at all, the latter is only answered with a curse, because accepted the world over as mere empty sound. Poor under dog! Now I, Mark Watson, am the under dog. When the day of my defeat came, I knew what the result meant for the rest of my days, and, accepting the world's decision, I withdrew from it. I was not invited to commit suicide, but to give place to others, and so here I am, comfortably cabined in the Bear Swamp, and I had hoped forgotten; but the upper dog has tracked me to my retreat, and I am commanded—not requested—to meet him at the Horse-Head Inn. For what purpose

he does not state; I can conjecture. My correspondent is uneasy. He wants an explanation that I cannot give him, except by criminating myself, and so, in anticipation of trouble at the meeting, I record these words. Why I do so is hardly apparent to my own mind. I shall so securely conceal the wallet in which they will be placed that it will be rotten before it is seen again, should I not return. I have a strong feeling that there may be a second struggle,—I know it,—and again I shall be the under dog, and not, as before, able to crawl away. What is the meaning of forebodings? There seemed every reason to believe that I had found a safe retreat; but I have been uncomfortable of late, and this letter confirms my suspicions. An under dog is always thinking of himself, and I shall not lie down without a protest. I shall meet this man, very likely to be murdered by him. It will not be my good fortune in any struggle to be the upper dog. I feel that I am coolly going to my death.

"M. W."

On other pages I found,—

"There is yet time, and I will add the cause of our quarrel. A neighbor's son was an impatient lad, and must either rule or ruin. I did not differ from him, and though mere boys at the time, we were desperately in love. The object of our adorations proved to be the same lass, and she, wise as beautiful, encouraged neither one of us. My companion attributed her indifference to my influence, and I held her coldness towards me to be the result of misrepresentations on his part. So, day by day and week by week, matters grew worse, and finally we agreed to fight for the fair maiden. How we were to fight we never considered. No weapons were mentioned, and on that fateful day I met him at the appointed place, with a plucky heart and a hard fist. He, it proved, carried concealed in his coat a long-bladed knife. Our mutual friend, sworn to silence and to a just decision, was Thomas Laurie's 'bound-boy,' who was a man in years, but a boy still, and dearly

loved a lark. We drew the boat up among the button-bushes, and walked to the centre of an island in the creek. Here we were sure of being out of both sight and hearing. Confident in my strength, I bade him to come on, planting my right foot firmly against a projecting root and holding my arms in readiness to give and receive a blow. At a glance I saw a devil in the lad's eye, and saw that he had a knife, with which he hoped to bring me to his terms. It proved to be more of a weapon than he had planned. In my anger I sprang savagely at him and clutched at the knife. He drew it, and jumped from me as he did so. Cæsar, frightened by the course the events had taken, rushed in to prevent danger, and in the scuffle was stabbed. His piercing shriek brought us to our senses. There Cæsar lay, motionless and bleeding, and two more terror-stricken lads never drew breath. Our one hope for the moment was to prove that Cæsar had fainted only; but we were convinced that he was dead, and then we heard a voice. We were hopeless and helpless,

when the thought came we must flee, and I took the initiative, as the guilty boy was hopelessly crazed by fear. I forced him into the boat, and knowing every crook and turn of old Crosswicks, was soon out of reach of immediate pursuit. We rowed by night down the river, and hid, crazed by hunger, all day, and reaching the city, shipped as sailors in an out-going vessel bound for the West Indies. Luckily for us, men were in demand, and no questions were asked. Without money to purchase extra clothing, we were only too glad to crawl on board and trust to luck. Our captain evidently took in the situation, and was helpful in more ways than one, without asking embarrassing questions.

"We had no news from home, and consoling ourselves that we would all three be believed to be runaways, for we never thought, until too late, of Cæsar's body ever being found, started on our new careers. My old companion, by this incident, had less than myself been cured of his wildness, but now he would usually listen, which was some-

thing of a gain. Both while on board ship and after we landed I was greatly concerned about him, as he occasionally gave way to fits of despondency. 'What a fool I have been!' he would mutter to himself over and over again. 'Who has not been a fool more than once in their lives?' I would ask him. 'What an infernal big fool I have always been, then! Will that suit you?' he would say, with great vehemence. I would have to use all my powers of persuasion then to quiet him. I argued it was an accident, and Cæsar was killed, not murdered. This moodiness increased, and I feared he might, through sudden impulse, strike me down, so that, the secret being only his, he would feel more safe. I had sworn never to divulge a word, for I am now telling no damaging secret, and after a fashion we were friends in that strange country; but I never failed to keep very wide awake when with him, for there was a glitter in his eyes that I did not like. He had a very taking way with strangers that I did not possess, and became popular. Soon after landing he found em-

ployment and settled to hard work. We married at about the same time, but, unlike him, I was always homesick and loved to loaf. The climate was not suited to me, and I had arranged to return, when my companion's wife died, leaving him with an infant but a few weeks old. He called upon us in his distress, and my wife took the child, though she had one of her own of nearly the same age. This delayed but did not set aside my wish to return to Nottingham. He, too, favored it, much to my surprise, and was anxious his child should be taken to its grandfather's home, and he left to me all minor arrangements on reaching Philadelphia. When we landed I went directly to the old neighborhood, and by cautious questioning learned that neither he nor myself had ever been accused of murder. In the several years of my absence my people had scattered or died, and my name was omitted from my father's will. I was quite content as matters stood, and used my scant savings for building after a time this cabin in the woods, and here I am. The many

plans that I have made from time to time have generally miscarried. An unexpected occurrence took place on shipboard, and another when I brought my wife into Nottingham. Now, when the past grows misty, its many ghosts rise up to plague me. Strangers appear upon the scene. Whatever their purpose, it means ill to me. As it proves, no one was guilty of murder. As to the later act, I was blinded by the glitter of gold and my wife's strange influence. No excuse, it is true, but I feel the better satisfied to have said even this.

"M. W."

The old Nottingham families are all gone, and with them the many stories that were once common to the bar-room of the Horse-Head Inn and the chimney corners of many an old farm-house. Before the whole township became bespattered with strangers and sturdy men of affairs were replaced by unambitious plodding folk who toil amid the ruins of colonial greatness, I had learned something of the families that originally

settled along the valley of the creek and beyond to the river's shore; but this "upper dog" that Mark Watson describes was a stranger to me, and no one living could recall him. This circumstance nettled me. I had solved other problems in my day, so why not this one?

When we come to think of it, it seems all too strange to believe that trace of any kind, any old trunk stuffed with papers or other means of illumining a dead past, should have withstood the corroding touch of Time, but so it proved, and I learned as a reward of patience something of the career of Mark Watson's companion and of his contemporaries when the century was new.

THREE BEECHES, October 5, 1896.

Chapter I

Hutton Hall

No music breaks upon the air
  Save many a wild bird's call,
Yet joy is not lacking there
  In stately Hutton Hall;
For songs that linger in the heart,
  To which no words belong,
To Ethel added grace impart;
  Herself the soul of song.

AWAY back in the early days of the settlement some one with a tinge of romance had given the new house of the Huttons this high-sounding name, and while the generation then alive was too prim in its Quakerism to use it, it was with evident pride that they heard it used by others.

It was not inappropriate, considering the English ancestry of the family, and as was very natural, even among the Quakers, where pride holds equal place with humility, a later

generation openly used this dignified reference to their home without rebuke. When the present century was new, the owner of Hutton Hall would have felt insulted if reference was made to the place as an ordinary farm-house, and yet only a lively imagination could make anything else out of it. But it was never a shabby, ill-kept place. No press of farm-work ever prevented the grass from being cut or the rose-bushes from being trimmed. A weed was never allowed to mature near the house. There was never a board missing from the fences or outbuildings. It was as trim, neat, and pleasing, as a whole, as nature, aided by intelligence and taste, could make it.

It is not strange that the Huttons were proud. If occasion seemed to require it, the fact was freely commented upon that the family came voluntarily as people of means to West Jersey as early as 1678, and from Burlington had gone to settle this plantation, of which Hutton Hall became the centre. The head of the house had always been prominent in public affairs. If not quite as

old in the country's colonial history, they were as good as "Mayflower" folk, and had never believed in witchcraft or hanged Puritans. The latter clause was generally added when there were Church people in hearing, as a cousin of the Huttons, a Quaker, had been hanged in New England.

There is abundant reason to believe that at the outbreak of the Revolution the enforced non-combatancy of the Quakers was borne with little grace. Very many were disposed to take an active part, but the creed of their sect held with too firm a grip, and so it sank somewhat in their estimation. This active part would have been in practically all cases on the side of the king. They looked with disfavor and suspicion on the patriots of those troublous days, who were too loud-mouthed to be convincing, and to the credit of these silent loyalists, be it said, that it has never been shown since their day that the country would have gone to the dogs had the tide turned the other way. The Huttons were intensely loyal, and remained so to the end, accepting with

only outward grace what they believed were unfortunate conditions. Herein they were practical: they could not return to the mother-country without severe pecuniary loss, and the northern possessions were too bleak for their fancy. They became Americans, and their wisdom in purely local matters was so apparent that their views on questions of national importance were not adversely criticised. The Huttons did not assume the airs of aristocracy, but they firmly believed in the principles involved in this question. The principles of the Society were set aside just so far as they conflicted with this view, which has been of more than religious importance these last thousand years. Quakers, it is true, but after their own fashion: they still reverenced the king and regarded the President with mere curiosity as a doubtful experiment. The officers of the little colony of Nova Cæsarea had been of far more importance. They looked on the majority of the political upstarts of post-Revolutionary times with indifference or amusement. The Huttons could not rid

themselves of loyalty, and now it centred on their homes, the county, the State,—"colony" always to their minds,—and ended there. Of the country as a whole they were and were not proud, and herein they were consistent. They saw that it had prospered as much in spite of as because of the new order of things. They were well aware that Jefferson laughed in his sleeve when he wrote that all men were created free and equal. From the beginning there has been master and servant, and so it will be to the end of time, though the fact is disguised by coining new phrases and the law abolishes this and that legal aspect of man's unequal condition. Slavery was a crime, but it was slowly changed to servitude on a wage scale that simply removed the involuntary element of the question.

Death had, in later years, laid a heavy hand upon the Hall, and now its occupant and sole possessor was "Margaret Forsythe, widow," as her tax bill was addressed. She and her niece represented the once prominent

Huttons. Of course the neighbors shook their heads at first, and predicted that the property would pass to other hands. Margaret Forsythe was no fool, but could she manage such an estate? Would it not go down and she be forced to sell, or would she not be cheated by the people she employed? She had married early in life and had lived much in the city until recently; and now, a woman of forty, what could she know of the care of a plantation?

"There isn't a darky on the place but could steal the spectacles off her nose," some one remarked, and the overwise tavern-loungers laughed.

"Let the darky try it," was her reply, when she heard of the prediction.

Though all Margaret's neighbors, both male and female, anticipated financial disaster, yet not one ventured to offer any advice, for the simple reason that she was a Hutton, and their fathers' experiences had been inherited as a wise discretion.

Very naturally, the niece had been overlooked. Every one had known her from

infancy, and no one realized that she was no longer a child. Age is slow to discover wisdom in young heads. Although a bright young woman of twenty summers, surely she could not figure in such matters as farm management. But suppose she married a capable farmer? From the day of her being brought to the place, an orphaned infant, until now, it had never dawned upon the minds of the people living near Hutton place that such a thing might happen; and now when in some unknown way the rumor had got abroad that Ethel Hutton had a visitor, vulgar curiosity was all agog. But was the rumor more than idle hearsay?

What of the house? Like many of the structures of that early day, it was merely a number of boxes set together and piled one upon another. Four big square ones on the ground-floor, with a broad passage-way between them, and six smaller ones above, and capping these, one long flat box, covering all. Living-rooms, sleeping-rooms, garret. Hutton Hall differed from some in the

province in this, that it was entirely free from all ornamentation. No reeding on the high wooden mantels; no hills and hollows in the panels of the doors, and the surbase as plain as the carpenter could make it. Even the bare wood was of too elaborate design, and the veining of the yellow pine and wrinkles and mottlings of the oak and maple must be hidden by lead-colored paint. It was the concern of some fanatical Friend that their houses were too gay, and the whim swept like a forest fire through the meeting. A wicked Churchman suggested that some Quaker merchant was overstocked with paint of that color. Of course there was a reaction in time, and coat after coat of white had been applied, but in aggravating obstinacy the dreary leaden hue showed everywhere in spots. All this undesirability, if nothing worse, because the inmates were Quakers; and yet, strangely enough, no farm-house for miles around was so surrounded by roses, honeysuckle, and every bright flower at command. Beauty that was nature's handiwork was worshipped, but to imitate it, how-

ever feebly, was a sin. This creed, that lacked all warrant, no one dared openly dispute, yet not a man or woman but secretly detested it, save the few who were carried from sound sense by unrestrained zeal for religion. They were a strange people then. Intolerance was, of course, rampant. No other people ever accepted the doctrine of infallibility more implicitly than they, provided the questions involved were referred to their judgment. So much for consistency.

But if Hutton Hall was as plain as a pike-staff when it left the hands of the builder, it always had an atmosphere that fanaticism could not poison. There was something more than a feeling of comfort when you entered the house. The mind as well as the body was refreshed. The furniture had a great deal to do with this. There was an abundance of it, and not a carving on any piece had been planed away. Even the tall clock retained its carved gilt torches, and the mirrors in their quaintly carved frames, the claw-foot tables, easy arm-chairs, and well-filled bookcase made one feel sure that a

refuge was offered here from the gloom with which George Fox and his followers had hoped to wrap the world. The solid shutters of the house could not wholly exclude the sunshine, however closely they were keyed. A ray of golden light finds entrance somewhere, and in time gradually diffuses itself throughout the room. It was so with themselves. Their efforts to shut out the sunshine of reasonableness was unavailing. Beams of life-giving worldliness would creep in.

In later years, the interests of the Huttons, as of their co-religionists, became a complexity of merchandise, politics, and religion, with an importance in the order here named. There was no lack of attendance at meeting; no shirking of the work incidental to its welfare; but other matters were not forgotten at any time or under any circumstances. They did not, as the Church of England neighbors have done, trade horses at a funeral, but their minds were ever prone to wander towards secular matters directly meeting was over, and the crops, weather, and political outlook, far more than the sermon, were discussed in

the meeting-house yard. So, at least, it was with the men. And the women? Well, they noted the first appearance of every new bonnet and black silk, and could tell just how long Elizabeth was talking to Thomas.

As the location was central, the house large for that time, and the several hosts men that loved company,—even poor company better than none,—so it came about that Hutton Hall was the place for general gatherings from the earliest days, nor did the custom change after the inn was established while there was a male Hutton dwelling at the hall. Contact with the world, and especially with people of other faith, was effective in broadening the minds of the younger generation, and this influence, unrecognized at first, was most manifest in Edmund, the last of his name and father of Margaret Forsythe. The only son, Robert, disappeared suddenly, and all the community could ever learn was that news of his death reached the Hall at last, and his daughter, Ethel, an orphan, appeared upon the scene.

No one dared ask inquisitive questions of Edmund Hutton, and all the public ever learned was that Edmund omitted all reference to his son in his will, and Margaret Forsythe inherited the estate. As years rolled by Ethel became a girl of commanding appearance and manners, and long before she reached her majority very much in evidence. By the servants and farm laborers even she, more frequently than her aunt, was appealed to in matters of minor importance.

Hutton Hall in 1805 was still an interesting place. It was the one spot that the idle curiosity of the neighborhood could not penetrate.

"That place is like a ring with a big and a little diamond in it," was the remark of the proprietor of the Horse-Head Inn, after a business call at the house. "Somehow they ain't just like other folks. Talk about different things; and then there were books, too, more'n a hundred of 'em."

The latter fact explained the whole matter.

Of course, in the eyes of her less cultured

neighbors, Margaret Forsythe appeared peculiar. She was not at all times readily approached. She was a widow who had known but a few hours of supreme happiness,—wedded and widowed the same day. Her father's horses had run away and overturned the coach as the young people were on their way to Philadelphia. The husband was killed, the wife much injured. There was quick recovery from her wounds, but Margaret never recovered from the shock. For twenty years she had not failed daily to shed a tear in memory of Ellerslie Forsythe. In the weeks immediately following her bereavement she was not supposed to be sufficiently resigned, and her outbursts of indignation at the inane prattle of meddlesome friends shocked the whole meeting. "The brightness of her day," she said, "had been blotted out: she was willing to grope in darkness; in fact, it was compulsory; but be it understood, she had deserved no such fate, and would rebel forever against sermons on resignation being dinned in her ears."

To-day it was well that no one called, for

she was not socially inclined. The weather was intolerably hot, and all the forenoon she had been preserving plums. The fire was perverse; either too fierce, and so scorched her greengages, or languid, and only her temper bubbled and boiled. Every summer she had declared she would let the servants attend to it, and every year feared they might bungle and she be without the indispensable plums in the house. No plum preserves,—it made her tremble to think of it!

At last the work was done to her infinite relief. She was now prepared to meet all the demands of hospitality. A week ago she had "done up" blue plums. These were for ordinary folks, and the gages for "nice company." This was Margaret's distinction. Had her visitors but known it, they could have classed themselves as Margaret Forsythe classed them, by the quality of the preserves set upon the tea-table. The highest mark of distinction she conferred upon any one was to offer them her greengages. Her table, too, was set according to the guests, and this brought about a

little trace of heart-burning at times. "I don't like them chaney cups with bits o' handles," Debby Tilton once remarked; "you're to drink from 'em and can't wait to cool y'r tea in the sa'cer. Give me the old kind without 'em."

"You don't drink from the handles, do you?" asked Ethel, moved by the mischief that was ever ready to burst forth.

"Who said you did? Y'r to drink from the cups instead o' the sa'cers, I said."

"You meant to and did not. How like the world nowadays! It is risky to take it up just as it said,—you get into a peck of trouble if you do."

"Ethel, dear, you forget," remarked her aunt, and the subject was dropped.

Later, however, it was brought up, when Margaret said to her niece, "Ethel, dear, do be a little more discriminative. Debby is a good, kind creature, but——"

"But what?" asked Ethel.

"A distressing case of nobody who proclaims her nothingness by much talking." And Margaret faintly smiled.

"Oh! I see. *Tra, la, la!*" And Ethel skipped away on the tips of her toes.

When intently thinking, and even when knitting and not averse to interruption, Margaret Forsythe was rather forbidding in appearance, particularly to young people. Her black silk, stiff as card-board, was too like the cloud that shuts off the sunshine; but sometimes there occurred, without apparent cause, a break in this monotonous austerity, or what seemed like it, and a rippling smile would light up her whole being as brightly as the glint of sunshine playing on the silver needle-guard pinned at her side. There is, of course, a side entrance to every individual as to every saloon, through which the privileged few came and went without restraint or formality. Ethel, naturally, was one of Margaret's intimates; the only one at the Hall or in the neighborhood, in fact. Margaret not only read a great deal, but, like her forebears, had always shown a marked disposition to think for herself, and this, as always follows, made her theologically lax in some directions, as the Friends thought,

but she remained no less strict than her co-religionists in others. Her independence gave her a certain amount of originality when compared with them, but she hardly deserved the suggestion of a wicked neighbor who had been rather worldly in his day, that "Peggy Forsythe was a lop-sided Quaker." She was, in truth, far more consistent than many of the Friends who criticised her, nor was she, like them, clad in an impenetrable armor of self-conceit. She talked well and did not harangue, as was then too frequently the custom, and often quoted Scripture, but more frequently Scotch poetry, and the unbiassed observer concluded that in the long run she preferred Robert Burns to St. Paul.

Ethel Hutton was wholly unlike her aunt in some ways, yet had all of her good qualities. "She favors her grandfather," was the common remark, and, "She's got the Hutton eye and curl to the lip if any one ever had," was also admitted by those who remembered her grandfather. As to her general appearance, she had light hair, and so much of it

that it was not always under control, but was never frouzy. If loose, it floated gracefully. Her eyes were intensely blue and clear, with the light that comes and goes, signalling the emotions as surely as the vane points the wind's direction. The "curl of the lip" that so frequently was commented upon was another indication of her intensely active temperament. Ethel was a superior soul in a beautiful body,—a gem of value in an artistic setting. As a contemporary has left on record, "she made the surroundings." There was nothing commonplace about her. Her individuality reflected upon all objects that she came near. Did her parents have foreknowledge when they chose her name, Ethel,—noble?

The lads and lassies of the neighborhood were always afraid of her, even when they were but mere children together. She was full of fun, could romp, was ever ready for a harmless, practical joke, and yet not one of these girls or boys but stood a little aloof, only advancing as far as required and never taking the initiative. The wholesome free-

dom that is appreciated by youth was lacking in this instance. No preaching of the Friends could break the strongly felt but unseen barrier down. There was that something about her that her aunt also had, an indefinable distinction that kept her, in a certain sense, apart. The divinity that doth hedge a king, some one suggested; it was really the influence that superiority sheds over less-favored folk, for such varying conditions ever have been, resulting in the appearance at intervals of persons who rise far above the common crowd, designed by nature to be leaders, and invariably they are. And what a fearful condition would that be with all mankind on a dead level! Even among her child-friends she was not simply Ethel, but Ethel Hutton, heiress of Hutton Hall. Nothing of this was ever mentioned, yet the fact was never overlooked. The other young people were but the children of their parents. Ethel could ride, swim, and, after the rude fashion of the time, was an amateur naturalist, knowing in a practical way the plant and animal life of the whole

neighborhood. Her tutor in all out-door accomplishments had been for many years the chief servant of the household, and now, advanced in years, was a counsellor and friend rather than a menial. Ethel's grandfather had found him badly injured when ranging the meadows for woodcock, and on the man's recovery, which was long after, took him into his employ, and so it came about that Cæsar Chesley was Edmund Hutton's constant attendant up to the time of the old gentleman's death. Cæsar, though somewhat advanced in years, was by no means decrepit in mind or body. He it was who had said years ago, "There are three kinds o' people in the world, the rich and the poor and the Huttons, and they're odd," and later he supplemented this with the opinion, "but Miss Ethel, she's more'n human." The neighbors said Cæsar would have died to save his mistress, and so they thought he was about half crazy. Cæsar's mother was an Indian, and this fact explained what the people about there could not comprehend.

Nothing of all this had worked mischief.

Ethel was now a woman, and looked out upon the world with a woman's eyes. She had gathered abundant knowledge, though her regular schooling had been limited, and was wise in that she fully realized the abundance of her ignorance. In short, she was not like other girls, but this did not make her unlovable. She had genuine, admiring friends; but what had ever happened to give rise to the rumor that she was favoring the attentions of any one of them no one seemed to know, unless it arose from the fact that a stranger had recently jumped from the stage as it drew up at the Horse-Head Inn and darted across lots to Hutton Hall in great haste and was not seen again until the next day, when, just as the return stage arrived, he suddenly reappeared as if he dropped from the clouds, and, plunging into a back seat, turned his face away from the tavern-loungers and was plainly seen by no one of them. It was a question whether he was young or old, nor did the inquisitive folk learn much from any one living at the Hall. They either could not or would not tell.

"It isn't fair that folks should carry on so," said one old man; "if all the travellers were like that one, what would we have to talk about when they were gone? Seems to me folks ought to be sociable like, even if they do be strangers."

This man had never been from home, and the weekly paper that was read to him was not so satisfactory as the opportunity to question the passengers, when the east- and west-bound stages stopped to change horses at the inn.

So much for Hutton Hall, its history, its inmates at the time of our story, and their surroundings.

This sleepy August afternoon the Hall and the neighborhood were in a comfortable state of repose when Ethel appeared and noiselessly closed the front door behind her, letting down the huge iron latch very gently so that her Aunt Margaret might not be roused from her accustomed afternoon nap. She hesitated a moment, and then walked slowly along the narrow path leading to the

carriage drive at the west end of the house; stopping again at the great white stepping-stone and looking for several minutes intently down the lane. She was not expecting any one, and yet was strongly inclined to look along the rows of thrifty apple-trees that now offered a tempting shelter from the fierce heat. Then, as if a sudden thought had struck her, she turned to the opposite direction and would have gone to the wooded slope that separated upland and meadow, but before proceeding more than a few steps she heard her name spoken in a low voice, and, looking back, saw Cæsar Chesley hurrying after her.

"Well, Cæsar, what is it?" she asked, as he came up.

"I have something on my mind, Miss Ethel, and can't keep it any longer. Do you know who it was that called last week and stayed overnight at the Horse-Head?"

"Why, what a question, Cæsar! Is thee losing thy mind? Did thee not hear his name? Why does thee not use the plain language in addressing me? I felt like

laughing at thee, for I thought of those funny Laurie children. One of them said to me, 'What does thee think, Ethel, Benjamin swored. He said 'you' to me real out loud."

Cæsar did not laugh, but waited for Miss Ethel to tell him the stranger's name, which she quite forgot to do. He waited respectfully for a moment, and then said, "You have not told me who it was that called. May I not know?"

"Did I not?" Ethel replied. "It was Fretwell Farnsworth. But now it is my turn to ask questions. Why does thee ask?"

"Fretwell Farnsworth," Cæsar repeated, thoughtfully; "has he been here before?"

"I think not," Ethel replied, with a puzzled look, for she saw that Cæsar was either sorely troubled or insanely curious. "He said that he had heard the place was for sale; but what he seemed most interested in was what Aunt Margaret was willing to tell him about my father. He claimed some sort of relationship, I think, with the Huttons, and asked about any old papers aunt had referring to the old folks."

"He did?" cried out Cæsar, with unusual emphasis for him, and then lapsed into a moodiness that was quite Indian-like.

"Why, yes," continued Ethel; "but why so excited over it, Cæsar? Thy manner worries me."

"Because, Miss Ethel, some one has been in my room rummaging in the old chest that has been in my care since your grandfather died." And Cæsar looked fiercely about, as if he would like to fly at the throat of the thief.

"And thee thinks that it was our visitor? Cæsar, is this doing right? Of what use could these papers, or whatever is in the chest, be to him? And he was not alone while here; and even if he had been, could he readily find thy old chest? I am afraid the flying-squirrels have been playing in it,—does thee leave it open?—and thy fears have got the better of thee, Cæsar."

"It is very strange, Miss Ethel, but on my way back from Philip Flint's I found this." And he produced an old red leather wallet, closed by a silver shield-shaped clasp, upon

which were engraved the letters E. M. It was much out of shape from having long been overfilled with papers.

"Did it come from the chest?" Ethel asked, without taking it.

"It surely did," replied Cæsar, very seriously, "and I have seen it every few days these many years. This was an old wallet before your grandfather was born. I would know it anywhere. Don't you see that it has the Mauleverer stamp upon it? Folks don't carry that sort of a wallet in these days. You say the visitor was Fretwell Farnsworth; now, Miss Ethel, I know my place, but ought strangers to go into a room without being asked and take what doesn't belong to them?"

"Oh, Cæsar!" Ethel exclaimed, "thee should not say that," and added, after a pause, "I have it: aunt must have given it to him; let us go ask her." And Ethel turned towards the house.

"Why should he go towards old Flint's with it, or lose it, with half the papers out of it? It was closed when I picked it up.

I cannot see how any one else could have taken it."

"And I do, Cæsar. Thee forgets that old Philip Flint was fixing the chimney that very day."

Cæsar drew a long breath and muttered inaudibly. His whole manner changed, and it was evident he was perplexed and surprised. He stood looking intently at the wallet in his hand, and Ethel as intently looked at him. Then, a little tired of standing in the hot sun, she said, "If this is a matter to be discussed at this time, let us go to the big chestnut by the fish-pond. There thee can tell me all thee knows and thinks, and thinks thee knows, before I go back to the house and tell aunt."

They sat down on the smooth turf at the foot of the splendid tree, long a landmark in the neighborhood, and Ethel began an examination of the wallet and its contents. There proved not to be a paper of real value among them all. Old memoranda merely of her grandfather's and of his father's before him.

"There was no reason for any one taking away a lot of old papers that I can see," Ethel remarked, more to herself than to Cæsar.

"The missing ones were not so very old; not old like the wallet," remarked Cæsar, who was very busy with his own thoughts.

"I didn't think of that; how stupid I am! What were the papers?" the puzzled girl asked, a little impatiently, and, without waiting for a reply, added, "Who was E. M., these letters stamped on the clasp?"

"You must ask your aunt about him," Cæsar replied; "a Mauleverer, of course."

"Oh, yes," said Ethel, wearily, for she had failed to find the subject as interesting to her as it proved to Cæsar, and was about to rise and go to the house, when the old man said, in an earnest way that at once caught her attention, "I am glad this man was careless."

"Thee persists, I see," interrupted Ethel, "in thinking it was Fretwell Farnsworth. This is so serious a thought, thee has spoiled my afternoon."

"I am very sorry, Miss Ethel, but it was too much for my old head at first, but mat-

ters seem to be clearing up a bit as I keep on thinking; old times come back, and I sort o' live over days I'd most forgotten," said Cæsar very slowly, and he kept looking intently at the horizon, as if he saw pictured there that which was not vouched to ordinary vision.

Ethel the while as intently studied Cæsar, and concluded that what he was thinking over was quite well worth knowing, and her surest way of hearing all about it was to have patience. Rather trying, perhaps, when dealing with a servant, but sometimes necessary.

"Whoever took the wallet," Cæsar continued, "didn't get all the valuable papers that were in it." And then he drew from his pocket a small, much-folded paper and placed it in Ethel's hand, saying, "That is your mother's marriage certificate, and perhaps it was that paper that Fretwell Farnsworth was most anxious to get hold of."

"Goodness, Cæsar, how thee frightens me!" exclaimed Ethel, turning pale and flushing rosy red by turns.

"Sorry, Miss Ethel, but you're not a child now, and we must all face the real world, which isn't what we thought it when we only stopped playin' to eat our meals."

Ethel smiled at Cæsar's way of putting the case before her, and felt disposed to ask no end of questions, but just what to ask puzzled her. She was just a little dazed by Cæsar's revelations, and like one groping in the dark. A rather long silence ensued, which was more satisfactory to Cæsar than to Ethel, who was the first, nevertheless, to speak.

"I think," she said, "that I begin to see through thy meaning, Cæsar; there is some mystery about my birth and parentage. I never heard anything but what aunt told me,—that my mother died when I was born and my father soon after."

"And I have nothing different to tell you, Miss Ethel," replied Cæsar. And he held out his hand for the certificate, which Ethel had not thought to look at, and placed it in the red wallet. Then he sat like a carved im-

age, moving not a muscle, and gazed at the cloud-flecked western sky.

For the first time in her life Ethel had come, as Cæsar said, face to face with mystery, and mystery, too, that pointed towards wrong-doing. It was a strange and thoroughly disquieting feeling. As she rose to return to the house she said, "I will tell aunt all about this, of course, unless thee has some reason for my not doing so at present; and has thee anything more to say before I do so?"

"Nothing, Miss Ethel, unless you leave out that I said who I thought stole—took the wallet out of the chest. Perhaps you needn't tell her that just now. If I may advise, why not show Miss Margaret the wallet," and he handed it to Ethel, "and ask her opinion of how it got where I found it, and let me work in my own way before you give her my opinion. She might think me going beyond my duty, and—well, perhaps I am all wrong." And Cæsar drew a long sigh of relief when he had finished his speech.

"Thy advice is good, Cæsar," Ethel told

him, in a friendly way that warmed the old man's heart, "and I will take all the responsibility of what I tell aunt." And with a cheerful movement, as if shaking off dull care, she took a homeward step.

"And, Miss Ethel," remarked Cæsar, as she did so, "you know two heads be better than one, but mayn't three heads be one too many?"

Ethel laughed merrily at this way of cautioning her as to saying too much, and replied that she would not mention anything more than was necessary at present.

Chapter II

At 39 Zane Street

Thus far man's little wit can probe
And careless eye can see;
Because one wears a spotless robe
No saint from heaven he.

PHILADELPHIA was a busy but not a bustling town in 1805. Nobody was ever knocked down by some man in a hurry too suddenly turning a corner, nor were people likely to be lost in a crowd. The greatest gathering was usually the assembling of Friends at Arch Street Meeting, but when the services were concluded there was not a trace of unseemly haste, but a quiet dispersal, and the humdrum of a well-ordered town was resumed. There was even less to give life to the streets after sunset, unless for a short distance about the few places of public amusement and the taverns. People

then were supposed to be at home, and long before midnight to be in bed. The tread of the watchman was likely to be the only disturbing sound, saving always the barking of some neighbor's dog—one's own dog is always well behaved—or the wailing of forlorn felines; also, never your tabby. But not every one retired at an early hour, even among those who disapproved of balls and even dancing at home. Here and there were men who had a genuine taste for literary and allied pursuits and burned, not without justification, midnight oil. Solomon White was one such man. His hobby was botany, and, being engaged in business, often his only available time to devote to it was at night, and frequently, too, long after the family had retired.

This evening rare plants were scattered over a small round-topped table at Solomon's side, and over the lid of his desk were many papers, drawings, and a book. The result of several hours' study were being gradually brought together, papers arranged in order, and the specimens laid between sheets of

card-board, when suddenly the tired student stopped, looked up, and listened. He thought he heard footsteps on his front porch, and then the knocker announced that some one was at his door. He immediately responded to the summons, and, without questioning as to who it might be, turned the big iron key and lifted the latch.

"Good-evening, Friend White," the visitor remarked, and Solomon, recognizing the voice, responded,—

"Why, what brings thee here at this time of night, Fretwell? Has anything happened? Come in." And Solomon White led the way back to the room in which he had been busy with his plants, followed by his late visitor, who fairly threw himself into an arm-chair and tossed a carpet-bag carelessly on the floor; all with the air of a man thoroughly tired and completely discouraged or disgusted. There was no fire in the man's eyes, as was usual to him, and Solomon saw at a glance that something unusual had happened, if not gone seriously wrong, and that Fretwell Farnsworth was not himself. He

patiently waited for his visitor to speak, and while so doing gave the man more careful consideration than ever before; recalled the fact that he had appeared rather suddenly upon the scenes, a retired merchant that had travelled in the South and announced himself a Friend by conviction. His wealth was undoubted, and this substantial backing was as good for the religious and social as for the mercantile world. Dollars are the best letters of introduction. Fretwell Farnsworth had had no connection with any meeting as yet, but attended at Arch Street with regularity, and once spoke briefly but very acceptably. He stood aloof to a certain degree, and gave as an explanation that he desired to be quite sure of himself before taking any important step. Caution had been the key-note of his business career. If he openly united with their society and found later it was an ill-judged move, it would be bad for both the society and himself. He desired to call himself a Friend, and trusted to be able to so live that they should have no cause to criticise him. In

short, Fretwell Farnsworth was liked by all and understood by none, and, being wealthy, close inquiry would be mere impertinence. Had any Friend been so disposed, he possibly could have determined the reason of his peculiarities, but Friends in those days were concerned with weightier matters.

To-night, however, Solomon White had a faint glimmering, as he believed, of the truth, and decided to lay aside his botany for the sake of determining the real condition of his visitor: was he given to drink or suffering incipient insanity? Why, indeed, should he be here, now midnight, with some momentous errand or with none? This must be determined. While this train of thought rushed through the host's mind, a few moments of slumber had soothed Fretwell's nerves, and he opened the conversation.

"I trust I can have a bed for the rest of the night," he said, "and to-morrow I will have more to tell thee than I can say now. I am worn out, as thee can see."

"That is very evident," replied Solomon, "but I should like to know what brought

thee here at this time of night, before thee retires."

"To tell thee now," Fretwell answered, a little petulantly, "unless I can have a stimulant, is simply out of the question. Has thee no wine?"

"There is spirits in the decanter on the sideboard." And saying this, Solomon went to the adjoining room and brought the heavy glass bottle, a tumbler, and a small pitcher of water, carrying them at some risk, as he had also a candle in one hand.

Fretwell drank pretty freely; which fact Solomon noted and continued to bear in mind, that the effects might be recognized, if they affected the reasonableness of his communications.

"I am awake at least," remarked Fretwell, "if not wholly rested, and now for my reason for this ill-timed intrusion. I came here rather than go to the tavern, or my own lodgings, because I must have a confidant, an adviser, and thee differs from others. I do not wish to flatter, but deal with facts."

"That itself is flattery——"

"Well it's truth," interrupted Fretwell; "and what I want to come at is this. I have just reached town from Nottingham, where I had business, and it terminated otherwise than I had hoped." Here the speaker showed undue agitation, and it dawned upon Solomon that there was something back of Fretwell's words that he purposed keeping there, or was he drunk? What was the character of the business in Nottingham? Solomon White felt sure of one thing: he did not propose to be the holder of any secret of an unsavory character. While preparing a little speech of his own, Fretwell continued: "I had hoped to secure the adjustment of an important matter, but the result was a rearrangement of conditions in a more complicated manner than ever, and I am farther away than I thought, and have dreamed for years, from my desired goal."

"And thee does not seem to be approaching the end of thy story, or even its beginning," remarked Solomon, with a trace of humor in his bright blue eyes. "What was thy errand?"

Fretwell partly rose from his chair, and, in a husky voice, and indistinctly, whispered, "To purchase Hutton Hall."

"To purchase Hutton Hall?" repeated Solomon.

"Yes," replied Fretwell, in a more natural way, evidently relieved that he had progressed so far. "Does thee know Margaret Forsythe?"

There was a pause in the conversation, and Solomon seemed very intent upon determining the length of the candle-wick and handled the snuffers nervously; then he said, very slowly, "I have seen her at yearly meeting."

"Friend White, I have seen more of the world than thee has, and can read men as thee reads thy books. Thy answer is evasive."

Solomon White was angry when he heard these words. They were true to the letter, but then, like all mankind, he did not care to hear the truth from this man in this plain manner. Perhaps he showed his feelings, for Fretwell waited patiently for him to take

up the conversation; and was disappointed when Solomon calmly remarked, with an effort of course, "The candle is nearly burned away, Fretwell, why not retire?"

"The glitter in thy eyes, Friend White, is all the illumination we require. In the dark words are not blind; they find their way home as surely as well-directed bullets. If thee pleases, we will continue. I pray thee keep thy seat yet awhile and listen patiently, for I am more moved to speak than ever thyself was in a religious meeting. I must tell thee." And Fretwell grew more earnest with every word.

"And why tell me of thy affairs? I do not wish to be the recipient of any secrets. I have none of my own, and I would that thee were as open as the day." And Solomon took up the candle as if to go from the room, whether Fretwell agreed or not.

"I beg thee to remain. To-morrow I shall be leaving town again, and——"

"Leaving me a party to thy doings," interrupted Solomon, "be they what they may; no, Fretwell, we must retire."

"Thee must remain," exclaimed Fretwell, firmly; and, rising from his chair, he held his hand out as if to press it upon Solomon's shoulder and force him to sit down again.

"I will be brief," he said, in a firm voice, that commanded attention. "Circumstances forced me, years ago, to act through an agent in whom I had every confidence, and, coming to Philadelphia, I have found him to be false."

"Did thee place thy affairs in such way as to have no means of redress in case of failure to do right on the part of thy agent? It is strangely unlike thee," remarked Solomon, with no show of resignation at this forced conference.

"No!" thundered Fretwell, excitedly. "It was not a mere money matter, but one where I was forced to trust another or do nothing. No! there were no means left; nothing but to accept the conditions as I found them, and nobody to right my wrongs for me. Is it strange, then, that I became my own counsellor, interpreter of law, judge, and"—then lowering his voice

and staring at Solomon with so savage an expression that his hearer rose from his chair and took a step backward—"and executioner?"

As Fretwell Farnsworth spoke this last weighty word he sank back, as if exhausted, in his chair, and at that instant the expiring flame of the candle flared up and filled the room with unwonted light,—then, thick darkness and silence.

Chapter III

An Interrupted Discussion

Poor mortals, under life-long ban,
Vain hopes are only sure;
Still we persist to lay our plan
And hold ourselves secure.

MARGARET FORSYTHE adjusted her spectacles and very slowly read the letter that Cæsar had brought from town. Then she toyed with the sealing-wax that was plentifully spread upon the overlapping edges of the sheet, and with exasperating deliberation pinned the epistle to her side. The while, Ethel was waiting for her aunt to make some comment. Letters were not a matter of every-day occurrence, and this one had an important, official look about it; but Margaret Forsythe was not made communicative by its contents, and, unmoved to speak, sat watching the exposed pendulum of the

quaint old mantel clock. Ethel, at last, got tired of waiting, and said, "Well?"

Her aunt replied as briefly, "Nothing."

This was the first instance in Ethel's recollection that the arrival of a letter had not caused just a little ripple of excitement; but the monotony of life at the Hall was evidently not to be broken by this most recent communication; not even the name of the writer was announced. Ethel was piqued at the turn of events, and so the delay on her part in reporting what Cæsar had told her the day before was likely to be lengthened. She, too, could withhold what news she had, and as her aunt was not communicative, she probably was not in a receptive frame of mind, and would not consider wisely all that she could tell her. Ethel was annoyed, and began humming to herself and looked out of the south window, where she could see the broad meadows and Crosswicks Creek in their midst. She was not comfortable. Yesterday Cæsar had unsettled her, and now her aunt was strangely taciturn. What was going to happen? she

wondered. A change had come over the spirit of her dreams. At last the silence was broken by her aunt remarking, "Ethel, dear, I think I shall go to town on fourth day to see Samuel Leake."

"And does thee wish me to go with thee?" asked Ethel in reply.

"I wish thee not to go with me," said her aunt, very emphatically, and then followed her words with so sweet a smile and loving glance at her niece that Ethel's momentary surprise and annoyance quickly vanished, and she reconsidered her own plans.

"Now, I have something to tell thee, aunt." And Margaret Forsythe settled in her easy-chair with an air of expectancy, roused by Ethel's unusual manner. Then followed a judiciously detailed account of what Cæsar had told her.

During the recital Margaret did not move nor did her expression change until Ethel ceased speaking, and then her only remark was, "Will thee please call Cæsar, if he is not too far away?"

This, of course, Ethel did; and when he

arrived, a few moments later, her aunt remarked, in a very quiet, matter-of-course, but dignified way, as one weighted with authority, "Will thee please tell us, Cæsar, precisely why thee associates Fretwell Farnsworth with the red wallet?"

"Why, aunt, I did not tell thee that he did!" exclaimed Ethel, much astonished, for she had prided herself on the caution she exercised in giving her account of the interview.

"I know, dear, but Cæsar does have such a thought, I am sure." And then turning to the old servant, who was likewise very much surprised, she said, "Now, Cæsar, we are quite ready to listen."

"The matter stands this way, Miss Forsythe," Cæsar said, in an embarrassed manner quite unusual to him: "if I knew less I might know much more, but knowing all I do, I know very little."

"Thee appears to be reading us a riddle, Cæsar, and just now I would prefer that thee speak in very plainest terms. Thee has thy opinions concerning a recent guest, and I am

so far concerned as to require them of thee." And Margaret Forsythe looked very steadily at Cæsar while waiting for his reply.

"What I said just now, Miss Margaret, I read somewhere in a book, and it seemed to suit my case. Your father 'set a seal upon my lips,' as he called it, and all I know I cannot say without breaking my word to him. It was unjust, but the visitor seemed the only one who could have taken it. There was no one else to my mind until Miss Ethel mentioned Philip Flint, who was mending the chimney."

"Yes," interrupted Margaret here, "and he was in thy room necessarily while at work, and his little boy came in the afternoon and was playing about until they went home at sunset. I think it is likely the child took it, and so everything is explained. The chest was not locked, nor does it set in a closet, and is just where a child would go if it was not watched. Thy suspicion of our guest was not just and does thy wit no credit." And Margaret Forsythe looked very sober and dignified when she ceased speaking.

"But," exclaimed Cæsar, with a flushed face—for the blood could redden his dark skin at times—and with his eyes flashing, fired as they were with indignation, "but——"

"But what?" remarked Margaret, calmly.

"But why did not old Philip see the wallet in the child's hands and take it away, and why are some of the papers that were in it gone,—all the West Indies papers but the marriage certificate? I have been along the back road and looked and not one is there. The child did not have the wallet, I believe, but——" and then Cæsar stood without speaking for a full minute before he continued: "I may say too much, and must not stay." And the man fled as swiftly and noiselessly as a shadow before sunlight.

Neither Margaret nor her niece were really aware at that moment that he was gone. Never to their knowledge had the Indian shown out so, and both were too surprised to speak. Cæsar was something more than an old, faithful servant, and now they knew it.

Margaret Forsythe was long occupied

with her own thoughts, but Ethel soon recovered from her astonishment and was ready to run after Cæsar and question him; but she felt that her aunt wished her to remain, and this she did in no very patient frame of mind. Perhaps it was her constant wriggling in her chair and perpetually picking and pulling at her sleeves and skirt that roused her aunt. Be this as it may, in time she turned towards her niece and said, "Ethel dear, how did our guest, Fretwell Farnsworth, impress thee?"

"Why, auntie, what a question! I was very proper and polite, was I not?" replied Ethel, amused at her aunt's manner as much as at what she asked.

"Certainly, Ethel dear, I have no fault to find; but what does thee think of him?" again asked Margaret of her niece.

"Really, I have not given him a thought; that is, until Cæsar spoke of him yesterday. Thee knows he came to see thee on business, and I kept out of the way."

"But thee saw him at meal-times when his conversation was general, and what of

him that thee can recall?" And Margaret showed she had a deep purpose in asking the question.

"I think," replied Ethel, with some deliberation, "that I should be afraid of him. But this is so foolish in me. I would hardly recognize him if we met anywhere else. I did not study his appearance or manner at all."

"And all the while he was here I felt," her aunt replied, "as if I had seen him before. Who does he resemble that we know?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Ethel abruptly, and followed her words with a trace of a yawn, which her aunt noticed and said, with a smile, "Don't let me keep thee, dear."

Ethel in an instant was on her feet, when *bang! bang! bang!* sounded the old lion's head knocker for the first time in many a day, and the equally methodical *bow-wow-wow!* of old Towser echoed it.

"Goodness! who's coming in that way? I didn't hear any carriage drive up!" exclaimed Ethel, and she rushed to the very window from which it would be impossible to see any visitor on the front porch. She

laughed at her stupidity, and was about to dart out of the room, when Cynthia opened the sitting-room door and announced "Mr. Walter," with the aforesaid gentleman immediately behind her.

Stupid Cynthia, not to usher him into the parlor, but the mischief was done.

Margaret Forsythe rose from her chair with a stately half courtesy and "How does thee do?" while Ethel was too much taken up with the general appearance of the young man to think of saying anything at all. She simply stood and stared, and evidently to the young man's amusement she realized in an instant, for then she said "Good-morning" as best she knew how, and laughed just a little in spite of all effort to control herself.

"Thee took us so by surprise," she remarked before he could introduce himself, "that I don't know but what I stood for a moment like a child chewing her apron-string. I beg your pardon."

The poor fellow's turn to be embarrassed had now come. He wasn't likely to get an

early chance to introduce himself or state why he had called, for Margaret followed Ethel's quaint speech with, "I am pleased to see thee."

This was encouraging, at least, he thought, and then at the proper instant anticipated the ladies by saying, "I am Ellwood Walter, of Wilmington, son of Captain Walter, of that place. I have no real business purpose in calling, and possibly no proper excuse for my intrusion, but merely to make, I trust, not a troublesome or unreasonable request," and having gone so far, Ethel's merry eyes twinkled so, he felt it was already granted. "I was taken quite ill in the stage on Monday evening, and I concluded it was wiser to remain overnight at the tavern"—Ethel looked sorry—"and rest for a day or two; and now that I am quite myself again, I cannot bear to think of going on to New York. While this weather lasts I want to stay in the country,"—may it last, persisted in running through Ethel's brain,—"and my errand was to know if I might not row about the creek in one of your boats."

"In all of 'em," broke in Ethel, with some emphasis, that rather astonished her aunt and the young man, and far more than they, Ethel herself, and she felt it high time to courtesy herself from the room, and this she did, leaving Mr. Ellwood Walter to settle matters with her aunt, all of which was quickly done by referring him to Cæsar whenever he wished oars, row-locks, or other boat-belongings. While the conversation was drawing to a close, Margaret noticed, with mingled amusement and concern, that the young man's eyes were never moved from the door-way through which Ethel had rather abruptly disappeared.

As Mr. Ellwood Walter walked slowly down the lane, Margaret Forsythe, again joined by her niece, watched him carefully while he remained in sight, and they determined him to be, without comparing notes, about twenty-five, of medium height, with strongly-knit frame, dark eyes and hair, and all the minor details that stamped him as a gentleman. His dress was of a de-

cidedly worldly cut, and so the more attractive, Ethel thought; and the quality and general condition gave evidence that this gentleman was not lacking in this world's goods. The subtle something wealth confers was a prominent feature. Not suddenly acquired wealth, which only distorts and never dignifies, but the wealth that goes with good breeding. Aunt and niece were both favorably impressed, yet neither spoke one word; but what surprised Ethel more than the morning's chief happening was that her aunt kissed her upon the brow as she passed by to take her accustomed place by the south window. It was something she had never done before. As Ellwood Walter walked up the lane he said to himself, "Pleasant people: Ethel, pretty name, and belongs to a pretty girl, too." And he smiled and half turned around to see if any one was looking, but caught himself in time, and stooped to pick a spray of golden-rod, that he twirled between his thumb and finger all the way to the tavern porch.

Chapter IV

The Stranger at the Inn

A straw may turn the current of a stream,
  'Tis but the little trifles of the day;
Some fancy born of a fantastic dream,
  That points, when we awake, our journey's way.

HAVING gone the rounds and seen that the whole plantation was in working order and reported the fact to Miss Margaret Forsythe, Cæsar's duties as an employee were performed and his hour of leisure had come, and, as was his wont, he gave it up to meditation. Usually this was of a retrospective character. Since his old master's death he had lived over and over again the days of his childhood and those over-full ones of recent years, when he attended the late Edmund Hutton almost wherever he went. As was well known to all, these two men, though master and servant, held many prolonged conversations, and always of a confidential character.

Occasionally they would end in hearty laughter, but more frequently by Mr. Hutton turning away and standing statue-like, lost in thought, and then, with a very apparent exercise of will-power, resuming his natural cheerfulness. There was not a neighbor but had seen all this, time and again, and commented upon it at his home or with other neighbors, but never was an explanation sought from those who possibly might have solved the mystery.

To-day Cæsar had his mind turned altogether to the consideration of recent events, and they loomed up the more prominently because of two discoveries. Old Philip Flint was wholly uncommunicative, which was unusual, and not disposed to accept an offer of work at his trade, indicating he had some money in hand, also an unusual circumstance, and he had been unduly emphatic as to knowing nothing of the red wallet. On the other hand, he was altogether contradictory, which fact was of some satisfaction to Cæsar. Incidentally he learned, too, that Mark Watson was missing. The

hermit-hunter's famous dog had been found locked in Mark's cabin starved to death.

Cæsar had more than enough to think about, and he admitted to himself that it was fortunate; it was matter only to be thought about and not to worry over. "No frettin' for me" was a common expression with him, and a sort of golden text that shone through the quiet days of his easy life. In recent events he was not personally interested nor involved. To think, therefore, was a pastime, and if it resulted in good to those who were his friends, to Miss Margaret Forsythe and Miss Ethel, so much the better. Curiosity, the invariable and unfortunate characteristic of woman, was to some extent, he found, developed in men as they grew old. At least it was so in his case.

Having beaten a shallow hollow in the hard-baked earth before him, he laid aside his precious oak cane, a present from Mr. Hutton, cut and carved by that gentleman years ago, and began searching the tree-tops for nothing and scanning the horizon for less. This was the invariable prelimi-

nary of Cæsar's talking "for a spell" to himself.

"If we only talked to ourselves the world wouldn't have many leaky mouths; but how dreary to be mistrusting everybody!—not their honesty, but their judgment. I have been studying the world for amusement ever since the old gentleman's death, for there isn't very much besides for me to do. Overseeing the plantation doesn't take all my time, and I keep a-thinking as I go about,—if I could only keep thinking and say nothing. But now I must keep quiet. My suspicions came too near getting me in trouble to speak my mind again; but between Mr. Fretwell Farnsworth, who is likely to turn up again and I am still doubtful about, and the young man at the Horse-Head, why, I am likely to be busy; that is, thinking of what it all means. I cannot satisfy Miss Margaret about the wallet, but perhaps I can satisfy myself, and that is half as good for her and twice as good for myself. I shall pump the truth out of old Philip if there's any rum in the cellar, but I am not putting too high a

value on his revelations I hope. There may be a silver lock on old Philip's jaws." And Cæsar concluded his meditations with a chuckle that sounded like the rattle of pebbles down in his boots. Commencing anew, Cæsar muttered, "I'll measure him soon, and begin work after getting his dimensions." And he chuckled again. "I do not want to waste my strength in running a race I can't win. But how are we to know unless we try? That is the secret of success in life: to know aforehand the limits of our strength. We don't waste time in vain endeavor. A good rule is thinking twice to acting once. It is being rash that does the harm. Everybody, I guess, has lost more from lack of thought than lack of luck. I'll find an easy job for Philip and get him over here when his money's gone."

"Goodness, Cæsar, what a muttering thee keeps up!" Ethel exclaimed, in well-feigned surprise, as she came up to him. "Has anything gone wrong with thee? Not fallen in love at thy age?"

"Your grandfather, Miss Ethel, thought poor company better than none, and what queer folks he did have about him sometimes! I was only talking to myself, for thinking out loud is easier than keeping shut up. You don't lose track of the game you're after so easy." And Cæsar resumed his ordinary manner both of speech and action as he replied to his fair questioner.

"And what was it thee was thinking about, may I ask?"

"The doings, Miss Ethel, of the last few days. Didn't you ever notice that the seasons are forerun by signs of the changes they make. Here it is August, and yet there's signs of fall, and so, somehow, I feel there is a change betokened 'round the Hall; just as if the old times had come to an end and there was to be a new order of things."

"Come, come, Cæsar, such gloomy talk will make me cry, and I came here in jolly spirits. Perhaps there's a touch of rheumatism in your bones, and you paint everything in Quaker colors. Now, please, Cæsar, let Fretwell Farnsworth and the old red wallet

and all the rest of it go. Come with me to the creek, and row me down to Swan Island and back; or isn't the tide right?" And Ethel by her gay manner and sunny words caused all the gloom to vanish.

"Sorry, Miss Ethel," Cæsar replied, "but the young man at the Horse-Head has the only good boat."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Ethel, in a dreamy way, and then she felt just a trace of warmth in her cheeks, and wondered if Cæsar would notice it if she had really reddened a little. Cæsar was no fool. He did and made a note of it.

"But we can go along the banked meadow," said Ethel a little later, "and gather some of the purple and gold bloom that thee told me about, or is it all gone?"

"We can go, of course, if you wish it," Cæsar replied.

"When did Mr. Walter take the boat?" Ethel asked, rather abruptly.

"About three hours ago?" replied Cæsar, amused with her suddenly roused interest in current events.

"Did he go up or down the creek?"

"Down."

"Then we will go up, flowers or no flowers, as far as Laurie's."

Cæsar had not considered that in three hours one could row a good way down the creek, and, returning with the tide, go up the stream. He really knew nothing of Mr. Walter's whereabouts. He supposed he had gone on some errand and not merely to kill time, and had not yet returned. It was, therefore, with no little astonishment that, on reaching Willow Bend, they heard a commotion in the water and an hallooing, mingled with a trifle of strong language; and, a few steps farther on, when they looked round the corner, where the creek abruptly turns, they found Mr. Walter vainly endeavoring to loose the boat from a stump that held it with a pretty firm hold. He was quite too far from shore to jump out, and when he saw Ethel and Cæsar was greatly relieved; but not so glad that he forgot to bow politely, and so put a pleasant face on his rather serious predicament. Cæsar cau-

tioned the prisoner to keep very still, as he might be pitched into very deep water, and promised his release by going back for another boat, and, turning away, he left Ethel on the shore within talking distance, if the voice was raised and they spoke distinctly. Ethel felt somewhat embarrassed for a moment and vexed at Cæsar's abrupt departure, who, however, returned very penitently and said, "I never thought about your being here alone; will you go back with me to the landing?"

All this appeared to her to make matters worse. She felt that Mr. Walter heard all that was said, though this was impossible, or he interpreted their movements. She really wanted to remain now that she was there, and told Cæsar to go back for another boat. To return might be the proper course for her, but she wanted to hear the young man talk from his prison, as Cæsar had called it, and who but he himself was there to criticise? Before Cæsar was out of sight Mr. Walter checked the discussion in Ethel's mind by calling out that it would be quite

cruel to leave him alone, and here was a case, if ever one was, where misery would appreciate company, and he then laughed so that the teetering boat threatened to toss him overboard. Ethel was highly amused at his involuntary antics, but made no reply. Then when quiet was restored, he called out, "Do shout an occasional cheerful message."

"Very well, I will," replied Ethel, and turning towards the creek and as near the water as possible, stood there, as she said, "on guard," until Cæsar returned.

"Is this the mischief you were plotting when you laughed so as I asked for a boat?" he shouted.

"Don't you think you deserve it? That is my boat; don't spoil it," Ethel called back, with some effort, and then turned away, looking for a seat. The rising wind made further conversation impracticable, and to her relief Cæsar soon came back, and Mr. Walter was set free.

Then Ethel slowly walked along the creek shore towards her home, only replying by a nod to Mr. Walter's remark, "Are you really

in league with the imp that guards old Crosswicks?" Cæsar rowed rapidly, and the course being straighter than Ethel's path, the man reached the landing before she did, and Mr. Walter, leaping on shore, came rapidly forward to meet her. She would have gone home by another route had that been possible, and was annoyed by the stranger's approach. She had wished to see him only at a distance; for what indeed was any stranger to her but a stranger?

"You were very kind to spoil your walk on my account; I am very sorry," Mr. Walter said, with just a trace of fun coming to the surface.

"I am glad that you met with no serious accident. Old Crosswicks is not kindly disposed to strangers," Ethel replied, scarcely knowing what to say.

"Does your remark apply to the neighborhood as well as the creek?" Mr. Walter asked, quickly, looking Ethel squarely in the face.

"Oh, I don't know about that. Was my boat hurt?" And Ethel looked up at him,

without really intending to do so. What splendid eyes he has! was her thought.

"Your boat is of more concern to you than my bones; well, that is natural; but I believe we came off without a scratch, both boat and boatman," he said, cheerily.

"I am very glad," demurely remarked Ethel.

"Of the boat's safety?" And Mr. Walter laughed.

"Of boat and boatman," she replied.

"Oh, thank you; and I won't endanger your favorite bateau again. To-morrow I am going to Philadelphia."

"To-morrow?" and then Ethel caught her breath. What difference if he went to-day?

"You seem surprised that I said 'to-morrow.' Why should I not?" Mr. Walter asked, with an amused expression.

"There is no reason that I know of, only you spoke of remaining several days," said Ethel, quickening her pace as she came nearer home.

"Besides," Mr. Walter continued, "your

creek, in my experience, is not as hospitable as your people, and I am not aspiring to fill a watery grave."

"Then swim," said Ethel, and they both laughed heartily.

I am getting along swimmingly, he thought, and after a brief pause in the conversation said, "May I go with you to the house and thank your aunt before leaving?"

"Certainly; but if you prefer it, I can thank her for you," Ethel remarked, just catching a glimpse of his face as she spoke.

"But I do not prefer it," Mr. Walter replied, emphatically.

Somehow, it seemed to Ethel, they walked very slowly along the hill-side hay road leading from the meadows to the barn. Continually she quickened her pace, but he would not, and so, in spite of her intentions, she dropped back to his slower steps; and she gave up at last, not unwillingly, the effort. Really, there was no reason for haste on her part.

At last they reached the door-yard.

"This is not the door I entered when

here before," he remarked, and looked about him with a puzzled gaze.

"No; you knocked at the back door, which is the front one only in a convenient sense, since it faces the road. This is the real front door, facing the meadows," Ethel explained.

"Oh, I see." And as he turned to look more about him, she opened it and asked him to come in.

"I beg pardon, but really it did not occur to me that I was not dressed for a call when I spoke of meeting your aunt again. Will you not do as you suggested, kindly thank her for me, and let me go to the tavern?"

"Oh, you were dressed sufficiently to call upon me, and take a walk besides," said Ethel, laughing; "you had better come in."

"Pardon, Miss Hutton, but did you not make the call, you and your attendant?" And he laughed at her quaint expression when she found the joke upon herself.

"Oh, as you choose as to coming in," Ethel replied, not venturing to say more, lest she be caught again.

"Perhaps I might call after tea and deliver my thanks in person to your aunt?" Mr. Walter suggested, looking rather quizzically at Ethel, for somehow he seemed to have known her for a long time.

"As thee finds no company, I imagine, at the tavern that attracts thee, will thee not come here to tea this evening? at six." And Ethel looked very quietly at Mr. Walter as she spoke.

"Oh, thank you; you are very kind; with pleasure." And Mr. Walter walked up the lane plucking golden-rod at every step.

"Was that Mr. Walter thee was talking to?" asked Margaret, as Ethel entered the room.

"It was, aunt; and I have asked him to tea," said Ethel, with a sort of triumphant air.

"To tea!" exclaimed Margaret. "When?"

"This evening, auntie; he is really very nice."

"But we know nothing of him," Margaret said, in a tone suggestive of doubt as to the wisdom of Ethel's invitation.

"I think I know something about him, auntie; really, he is very nice."

Ethel's manner was to some degree convincing, and Miss Margaret Forsythe settled into the dignified hostess in advance and thought of her greengages.

Chapter V

The Stranger within the Gates

Hold fast to a friend
  If you happen to find one;
Laugh at a lie
  And never mind one.

ETHEL's invitation had somewhat unsettled her aunt. There seemed so little time for preparation, and then was it not a rather forward act on her niece's part?

"I think I can read thy thoughts, auntie dear, but what's done can't be undone. Do not worry about it. Put a good face on it now, just to satisfy me, and scold afterwards. While I'm struggling with my hair and subduing ill-fitting skirts, thee make out the bill of fare. There's cheese and tea-beef,—the mahogany shavings I'm so fond of,—and peaches and cream, cake and Cynthia's biscuit, and, oh, what a pity! it is too soon for

thy greengages. Never mind, we'll feast the stranger within our gates as well as he has been fed at the Horse-Head. Goody! he'll be here in a couple of hours." And Ethel left her aunt to her meditations.

Margaret Forsythe smiled at the girl's enthusiasm and gave her orders to Cynthia, and then, save in the kitchen, quiet reigned throughout the Hall. But the Hall's mistress did not take advantage of the hour to indulge in a nap. She had had too many disquieting thoughts, and the letter from her lawyer, Samuel Leake, was an altogether unexpected matter. Although it did not affect her directly, it referred to some unpleasant features of family history which she had hoped were buried beyond resurrection. Then, strangely enough, she thought of Cæsar, and smiled as she compared the wild imaginings and crude attempts at philosophy of this old servant with the legal erudition of her counsel; for recently her estimation of the value of Cæsar's views had depreciated; and so the impulse, natural enough, some weeks ago, to seek his opinion was checked; but

then, she thought, it can do no harm, and, determined to be over- rather than under-cautious as to her questions, she left the house to find him. Search was never necessary in the afternoon. Cæsar was methodical to a degree, and while the summer lasted followed the shade from the lilac-hedge to the pear-tree, and so on to the wood-shed, where the post-prandial journey ended and his evening cares commenced. Then, too, his corn-cob pipe and home-grown tobacco left a trail behind it that was readily followed. You could almost tell the time of day by Cæsar's whereabouts.

Very naturally, he was surprised to see Miss Margaret at this time of day. Knowing her habits, he supposed her to be in-doors and asleep, and he was not less astonished when she asked, "What is thy impression now of Fretwell Farnsworth, and how does thee explain the disappearance of Mark Watson?"

"Why, Miss Margaret, excuse me, but I thought you had no good opinion of my judgment," Cæsar replied.

"When thy opinion is asked, Cæsar, I wish thee to express it. That is something very different from volunteering advice." And Margaret showed that she meant to exercise her authority, and Cæsar saw it too, but was not thrown off his guard.

"You force me to say that I don't feel satisfied with your explanation of the red wallet, though I've none of my own yet to offer in place of it. As to Mark Watson—well, I don't know."

"Thee evidently does not love to talk at all times or to all people, as I supposed," Margaret replied, a little impatiently, yet never losing her dignity. "I wonder that Ethel makes thee an authority." And she turned away, satisfied the old man fancied about everything, and seldom had a basis of fact for his conclusions. He was invaluable as her overseer, but nothing more.

Cæsar watched the form of the retreating woman with a countenance that steadily grew darker. A little, sometimes, made him very mad, and he would swear the spectacles off his nose, yet make no sound. His pro-

fanity was the visible, not the audible sort. Then Cæsar recalled Margaret's reference to Ethel, and his countenance immediately cleared. He shook the ashes from his pipe and, shaking his head at the same time, muttered, "It is too soon to begin talking."

An hour later, when Ethel appeared, there was evidence on her part of the successful subduing of every element of Quaker simplicity. She looked her best, and seemed, as her aunt thought, with some misgiving, "bent on conquest," and so was considerably surprised when Ethel remarked, "Aunt dear, please do thy very best as hostess this evening, as I have just a trifle of a headache and must keep quiet."

"Ethel," replied her aunt, reprovingly, "is thee not shamming just a trifle. Did thee bang thy head against the bedpost for the sake of a headache?"

"Indeed I didn't," said Ethel, earnestly. "I came against something harder than any piece of wood."

"And pray what was that, the brass and-

irons?" her aunt asked, concernedly, thinking her niece might possibly have hurt herself.

"A fact," replied Ethel.

"Why, Ethel, what does thee mean? Thee worries me of late."

"Do I, auntie? Well, I am not quite the same. The world seems different; even our little world here, with nobody in it." And Ethel laughed.

"Thank thee for the compliment implied in 'nobody in it,'" and Margaret looked as merry now as she had looked sober; and continuing, said, "But what of this 'fact' of thine? I would like thee to tell me, though I am not too old to see through the proverbial millstone. Thee does not read aright thy own impulses, perhaps, and makes a great bugaboo about nothing."

"The wonderful fact is that I am sorry I asked Mr. Walter to tea. But it was on thy account more than my own. We have had so little company of late." Ethel spoke these words very slowly. She did not know what to say, and as to the precise truth of the matter—well, that didn't matter.

Margaret was amused, though she concealed her emotions. "Give the subject," she remarked, quietly, "another hour's thought and thee'll find, I fancy, it was one word for me and two for thyself."

"Oh, auntie, no!" And then wishing to drop the subject, seeing she was worsted, asked, "Is Cæsar about?"

"Cæsar, Cæsar! what would thee do without him?" exclaimed her aunt, with mingled amusement and impatience. "Is he thy authority on all matters, and thy aunt goes for nothing?" And Margaret looked very intently at her niece.

"That is just a little cruel, is it not, auntie dear? Cæsar's advice has never been found valueless, even if the nasty old red wallet led him astray. I wanted to ask him about my boat——"

"And its late occupant?" interrupted Margaret.

"Auntie, please don't. I never knew thee to tease so. Now please be the leader in the conversation at tea. I really do have a headache." And Ethel went out to find Cæsar.

When again alone, Margaret Forsythe determined to leave nothing undone. She had a weakness for table display, and was fond of her wealth of snowy cloths made of home-grown flax, and then the ancestral gilt and white china and old silver. Her heart warmed when she saw them in order on the table. She would have Mr. Walter know that the Huttons were people with a history, and could announce the fact in no better way than showing the silver. It would strike the eye as mere words would not strike the ear. She soon became absorbed in her pleasant task, and, moving to and fro, arranged and rearranged the several pieces, as Cynthia brought in the eatables from the kitchen. Nothing escaped her close inspection, from the measured bricks of home-made cheese, so methodically piled as to resemble a child's tombstone, to the tea-beef shaved so thin that every edge was curled with precision; and experience told her it was enough to say to Cynthia to outdo herself at biscuit-baking.

Some time before the appointed hour Mar-

garet's mind was quite at rest, and she took her place in the parlor, to read for the one thousandth time her beloved Burns and dream a bit in the mellow sunshine that brightened the old room and its quaint furniture until it was positively cheerful.

Ethel found Cæsar in the wood-shed, and at once plied him with questions.

"What does thee think of the stranger at the Horse-Head? Did he ruin my boat?"

"He didn't more than scratch it a little, Miss Ethel."

"I would like to scratch him," said Ethel, impulsively; and she curved her pretty fingers as if to suit the action to the word on Cæsar.

"Why, what has happened? You seemed to find him pleasant enough on shore." And Cæsar looked very inquiringly at Ethel.

"Oh, I don't like my things injured, thee knows, and that boat is my particular pet. Thee built it for me, thee knows."

"It will take less time to put it in good order than when you sent it over the mill-

dam." And Cæsar laughed as he thought of that incident.

"Now, don't tease me, please. Thee's bad as aunt. What did Mr. Walter say when thee rowed him back to the landing?" Ethel asked.

"Why, if I remember, Miss Ethel, he asked questions like anybody would, and——"

"And what?" Ethel asked, impatiently.

"I answered them as everybody should." And Cæsar's eyes had a very merry twinkle in them as he spoke.

Of course, the girl wanted to know just what Mr. Walter talked about, and the man was wise enough to tell her nothing in particular. He knew that she would not be too inquisitive. How useless her assumption of indifference! Cæsar read her better than she could read herself, and felt justified in speaking only in a very vague way. Very respectful and equally unsatisfactory.

Ethel could not stay longer, and she saw that Cæsar was not communicative, so, not a little disappointed, she abruptly left him and

joined her aunt in the parlor, there to await the coming of Mr. Ellwood Walter.

Somehow, Ethel now felt as if the whole affair would be very formal. She loved a lark, and the whole matter had started as a bit of innocent fun, she made herself believe, and now the novelty had all gone with a few pleasant moments of anticipation. How very commonly this happens, she thought,—a whirl of amusement planned and not an iota of it realized! Why not live in an anticipatory world? Let realization go to the dogs!

So were her thoughts running when the guest was announced. The ladies rose to greet him as he entered, and his easy manner, quiet smile, and properly modulated "Good-evening" at once settled all doubts in Margaret Forsythe's mind. Mr. Walter was evidently accustomed to good society. She was ready to do her part.

Ethel had debated whether to shake hands with him or not. It was a Quaker custom that she did not like, and so withheld her hand usually when introduced to strangers

after meeting had dismissed. While the question was still uppermost in her mind her hand went out, and Mr. Walter took it lightly and bowed again. His hand she noticed was a very aristocratic one. There was a grace in every movement that charmed Margaret and was not lost on Ethel. It cured her headache: it was so unlike some of their boisterous neighbors. Ethel's mind was at once made up: he was an acquaintance worth cultivating, and how aggravating they knew absolutely nothing about him! All this would come in time, rushed through Ethel's brain, and then came the less welcome thought,—but he is going away tomorrow, and is a perfect stranger to them, after all. She found she still had a trifle of headache.

"I am glad thee found thy stay at the inn pleasant," Margaret remarked, "and I trust thee has quite recovered."

"I have, indeed," Mr. Walter replied, "and now I am quite in love with your beautiful neighborhood. The creek is charming."

"Even to the stumps that scratched my boat?" asked Ethel, looking archly at him.

"Even to the stumps. I have one of them, at least, to thank for this pleasant evening."

"Thee should engage a pilot when navigating strange waters," Ethel remarked, "and so decrease the dangers of the deep."

Mr. Walter evidently wanted to say something pretty about herself as a pilot, but considered it might be venturing into deep waters indeed, and was wondering just how to neatly turn the conversation into other channels, when tea was announced, and Margaret Forsythe led the way to an adjoining room.

The usual inquiries about tea and coffee —both had been provided—and the general chat incident to the passing of various dishes had been succeeded by brief reference to the weather, when Mr. Walter attracted the attention of both Ethel and her aunt by staring very intently at his teaspoon. There was a short and slightly embarrassing silence. Margaret thought at once of his having been

taken suddenly ill and so stopped at the inn, but Ethel saw more distinctly, and referred the matter to the spoon in his hand.

"Has aunt given thee a pewter one by mistake?" Ethel asked, not thinking such a blunder would have been overlooked by him.

"Cynthia!" called Margaret, when Ethel spoke, "pass the spoons to Mr. Walter." And in an instant they were at his elbow.

"Pardon me, ladies, but I can scarcely be as strong as I supposed. The spoon I hold gave me a veritable shock."

"We are so sorry," said Ethel, in mock sympathetic tones; "I did not suppose our spoons were electrified, or galvanized, or whatever it is."

"No, Miss Hutton, not that, but the pattern and initials are so familiar. I have seen it all my life." And Mr. Walter raised the spoon more nearly to the level of his eyes and examined it critically.

"I am much surprised," remarked Margaret; "they are old family silver belonging originally to my grandfather. There are

only eleven of them now. One was lost more than twenty years ago."

"And I believe I have that lost one," replied Mr. Walter, very deliberately. "It is a most strange coincidence otherwise. You have the eleven and I but the one."

"Assuming this to be true," Margaret said, much more interested than she admitted, "may I ask thee how thee came into possession of it? A single teaspoon is rather an unusual object to be so prominently in one's life."

"My father can tell more than I," Mr. Walter replied, with a return of his animation; "if I remember rightly he got it in the West Indies during one of his voyages, and I have been using it as long as I remember. In a funny way it was my primer, and my nurse taught me that the R. H. stood for my own name; so those letters and E. W. became somewhat mixed a little later on in life."

There was a slight show of merriment over his story, but both Margaret and Ethel were too much excited over the spoon's

history to think of the absurd features of its career. They were only anxious that he should continue with his history of himself.

"When I learned my letters correctly," he resumed, "I discovered this, very naturally, and asked about it, but my father always put me off with the answer that it came from the West Indies. My mother, I knew, died when I was an infant."

As he ceased speaking Mr. Walter looked up at Miss Forsythe and she at Ethel, and the latter stared at Mr. Walter. There was profound silence. Margaret, as quickly as she could, came to the rescue. "Thy information concerning thyself and *our* spoon is the more interesting to us, Mr. Walter, because that same spoon that we lost might have gotten to the West Indies. My niece was born there, and her parents died there when she was very, very young."

"Strange, very strange," Mr. Walter replied, and he looked at Ethel with a searching glance that might have been rude under ordinary circumstances. Then he laughed

merrily and said, "Well, Miss Hutton, I cannot see any family likeness; we are probably not related."

"But thee," Margaret said, addressing Mr. Walter, "reminds me very much of some one I have seen. Is thee related to any one in Philadelphia?"

"Strange to say, I do not know. I was adopted by my father when an infant in arms, and I know absolutely nothing of my origin."

"And I know precious little more of mine," said Ethel, rather sadly.

A chill seemed to have affected them all. The tea was a very mechanical one to its close. Before they were about to leave the table Mr. Walter said, "I am sorry if my venturing into autobiography has been at all annoying, but that spoon was positively startling. I shall certainly trace the history of that particular spoon most persistently, and when I know more, with permission, I will report in person."

"We should certainly be glad to hear more about it," Margaret replied.

"And are you not going to give it to us to make up our dozen?" asked Ethel.

"Well, Miss Hutton, that depends. Possession, you know, is nine-tenths of the law, and should you not prove it your lost spoon? Why not make it the hobby of your coming winter? Do you like historical research?"

"I don't know what I like, except my boat and—but I do not feel autobiographic." And Ethel looked at her aunt, knowing very well that Mr. Walter was looking directly at her.

Then they arose and returned to the parlor.

Ethel was silent. She thought of Cæsar's verbose way of saying that coming changes send their messengers ahead. To her Mr. Walter had appeared upon the scenes as a disquieting agent. She had hoped to find him amusing, and now all sorts of mysterious things seemed to be floating in the air. Her headache was real, and she looked at her aunt in a way that meant that she was no longer equal to conversation, and mutely called upon her to take the lead. The hint

did not fly wide of the mark, for Margaret began in a most lively way to discuss the general political outlook and current gossip so far as the weekly paper gave it; and then came that dear topic of local history; but the effort at cheerfulness was a failure. Mr. Walter felt that in some way he had blundered, yet for the life of him he could not tell how. The most he could do was to swear to himself at all teaspoons in general, and one in particular.

Ethel kept up a series of monosyllables and smiles, but was clearly not herself, and early in the evening Mr. Walter pleaded fatigue, time for preparation, and other formal phrases, and returned to the inn.

Aunt and niece did not keep up a running fire of comments after their guest had gone. They discussed nothing and made no mention of the teaspoon incident. Each was occupied with her own thoughts; and Ethel in her dreams that night recalled one remark of Mr. Walter,—"I am quite in love with your beautiful——" and awoke to realize

that he had said "neighborhood," not "niece," to her aunt; and she wished Mr. Ellwood Walter had never passed that way. What had she done to have her happiness disturbed?

Chapter VI

Fretwell Farnsworth reappears

A riddle has gone the rounds of earth,
  With none to tell where it began,
For every country boasts its birth,
  Its answer is that creature, man.
So sang a woman, but through my mind flits
The notion that it, woman, better fits.

When Solomon White awoke a little later than the usual hour the next morning his first thought was of Fretwell Farnsworth, and he proceeded to dress with more than ordinary haste, as he had a strong feeling that his guest had departed without the formality of a farewell. As he was about to leave the room, his wife entered and confirmed his suspicions.

"I did not call thee when I awoke," she said, "as thee retired so very late, or, rather, early this morning. I do hope Friend Farnsworth will not make frequent visits.

I am not favorably impressed at all." And Mrs. White spoke so decidedly that her husband was moved to defend the aforesaid erratic Farnsworth.

"Thee cannot convince me," she replied; "I was roused by his loud talking last night, and naturally rose up and listened. I did not know but thee had encountered robbers and was in danger. It would have been as well, perhaps, had I sprung the watchman's rattle out of the window."

"But, my dear, Friend Farnsworth has been greatly exercised of late and sought my counsel," Solomon explained, or tried to, but quite in vain.

"If he has suffered at all, it is through his own fault, I dare say. Solomon, I do not like the man. There is something wrong about him or I am not a judge, and his wild ravings last night quite convinces me." And Solomon's wife showed by her looks she meant every word that she had spoken.

"Did thee hear all he said?" asked Solomon, with some concern.

"I heard enough to satisfy me he is not a

proper person for thee. He has left, and I hope for good, and I cannot find that he has left any note of explanation. Simply stolen out of the house like a robber, though he has taken nothing with him. He did not even lie down on the outside of the bed."

"Did not!" exclaimed Solomon, who was slowly becoming convinced his wife was more nearly right in her estimate of the man than he had been.

"No," she replied, with marked emphasis. "He appears to have drunk spirits pretty freely before he left, as the decanter is now empty."

"I really do not comprehend——"

"Nor is thee likely to; but come to thy breakfast and let Friend Farnsworth take care of himself. I have no patience with such people. There can be no real good in them."

"Do be charitable, Elizabeth, be charitable."

"I expected to hear thee say that before this, Solomon, but may not charity be misplaced? I know that Friend Farnsworth's

remarks in meeting favorably impressed thee, but has it not been said that Satan can quote from Scripture, or something to that effect?" And Elizabeth White turned to go downstairs, feeling she had gained her case. She usually did—in her own estimation.

"I am really," Solomon remarked, having scarcely heard the eloquent outburst of impatience on the part of his wife,—"I am really at sea——"

"And likely to stay there. Do come to thy breakfast."

"And the more——"

"Because Friend Farnsworth is an enigma, and some day the Friends will be looking at each other and thinking a good deal more than they say."

Solomon White plainly saw that it was idle to attempt any reasonable discussion of Friend Farnsworth's eccentricities. He gave it up and ate his breakfast in silence, and so far in peace, which he endangered once by remarking, "Elizabeth, in some ways thee reminds me of Friend Hutton's man, Cæsar——"

"And Cæsar Chesley is no fool, Solomon."

Two hours later Solomon White was behind his counter, still wondering about his recent midnight visitor, when that very individual came into the shop, looking a good deal like one who had been on a protracted spree.

"I thought it better, Friend White, to leave thy house as I did, as I did not wish to meet thy family, for obvious reasons. I have been in close communion with my own thoughts and perfected all my plans. It may take years to carry them out, but I shall be occupied, and that is much, even if failure attends me. My only request of thee is, that thee will divulge nothing that I confided to thee."

"Thee certainly made no very definite statements, Fretwell, and I do not like to be bound to secrecy. What if I am asked if such a meeting took place?"

"That, of course, thee cannot deny, or will not, I suppose; but thee need give no

one further particulars." And Fretwell Farnsworth looked anxiously at Solomon, to see what impression his words had made.

"But Elizabeth overheard much that thee said——"

"She did?" exclaimed Fretwell; "then I need not seek for secrecy. What is it that they say about housetops when women are told secrets? But it doesn't matter. I said but very little, and we can ascribe it to the spirits I drank. I would that thee could keep thy wife from speaking overmuch, but why waste words over the impossible. Farewell. I take the stage for Lancaster at noon." And Fretwell Farnsworth left Solomon standing behind his counter, as quietly as he had left his house the night previous.

The pride of the bookseller, botanist, and man of affairs was humbled, for he was puzzled and sorely vexed, in fact, that he could not make more out of this strangely acting individual, the rich, educated, and at times brilliant Farnsworth. Solomon's good opinion of himself had had a shock. He could discuss botany and mineralogy and

current literature at the Wistar parties and attracted men of note to his own house, but here was a case where Elizabeth could read a man better than he could, and such is never a pleasant admission when the wife is unnecessarily given to asserting the excellence of her judgment. Solomon stood a long time looking blankly into space and endeavoring to see Fretwell Farnsworth as he was, and this season of debate with himself continued all that week; so much so that he made an occasional ludicrous blunder, and astonished his children once at table by calling his wife "Fretwell," which she did not take as a compliment. He became irritated at times, and this was the more noticeable because he had not the full measure of meekness that is the supposed crowning glory of a Friend.

One morning a rumor that came to him as such brought Fretwell prominently to mind, and Solomon, lost in thought, failed to notice that a customer was standing directly before him. This young person was essentially of a matter-of-fact build, and not caring to lose time, said in a very distinct

voice, "Friend White," and Solomon that instant was himself again, and apologized for his apparent rudeness.

"I was almost afraid to remain, thee looked so strangely," the young woman remarked, and then smiling pleasantly, asked, "Has thee any neatly bound scrap-books?"

"I think I can suit thee," Solomon replied. "They vary much in size and cost, thee knows."

"I want one for a birthday present, and look to its appearance rather than the cost," his customer said, with very noticeable dignity in her tone and manner, and Solomon was brought quite down to the plane of common sense and realization of the fact that for the time being he was a shopkeeper and must not be day-dreaming of his botany or the unfathomable Farnsworth.

A scrap-book was chosen at last at six eleven-penny bits and seven pence extra for printing in ornamental text a name upon the cover.

"And what name did thee say?" asked Solomon.

"Ethel Hutton, Nottingham," the woman replied.

"Ethel Hutton," repeated Solomon; "may I ask if thee is familiar with that section of Jersey?"

"Oh, perfectly; I come from there," she said. "I am Helena Laurie. Thee is Solomon White, I believe."

"I am; but the reason I asked thee about Nottingham was I had heard that Hutton Hall was for sale. Thee lives near there, I understand, and so might possibly have heard." And then Solomon wished he had said nothing of the kind.

"For sale!" exclaimed Miss Laurie; "I think not. It looks a little, it may be, as if a change might be brought about by a wedding rather sooner than by a sale."

"A wedding! Surely Margaret Forsythe——"

"Dear Aunt Peggy Forsythe; oh, no. Thee forgets that Ethel Hutton is not now a child, or is thee not acquainted? She has company now." And the young woman laughed as she said "company."

"I have some acquaintance with the family," remarked Solomon in a manner that showed he wished to discontinue the conversation, for another customer, a young man, had come in, and was apparently interested in their conversation; for as she turned to leave he stepped quickly forward and asked if he could buy a copy of the new novel just out, "Meddlesome Mattie." Hearing him speak, Miss Helena Laurie exclaimed oh! very audibly and beat a hasty retreat. He watched Miss Laurie depart with a good deal of undemonstrative amusement and then made his intended purchases, leaving Solomon White in a still greater state of general uncertainty; for who was the young man that had so completely disconcerted Helena Laurie? Could he have been Ethel Hutton's "company"? Indeed, could he be anybody else?

Chapter VII

Captain Walter, of Wilmington

That dead men tell no tales I doubt is true;
Do not your forbears sometimes speak through you?

"How's this, Ellwood? I thought you were in New York, and I've been looking for word from you. You sent me a note you were all right again after your rest at the tavern." And after greeting his son with this volley of question and comment, Captain Walter settled in his easy-chair and patiently awaited an explanation of his son's unexpected appearance.

"You are right, father; except as to my going to New York. That business will have to wait," replied Ellwood Walter, with a good deal of emphasis.

"Why, what the deuce has gone wrong?" his father asked, with a shade of annoyance; "wrecked on the voyage and put

back for repairs. You look kind o' peak-ed around the gills."

"And I don't know but what I feel so," replied his son. "Anyway, I've had an adventure, if I haven't been to strange lands. You know that old teaspoon of mine with R. H. on it——"

Instantly Captain Walter looked glum. He always did when that spoon was mentioned; and now his son was evidently so thoroughly in earnest, he feared something in another sense had gone wrong, and wished the spoon in the bottom of the sea.

Ellwood Walter noticed the change of expression in his father's face, but was too much interested to be cautioned by it. For once he felt that he must speak out and clear up the mystery at a jump. Of course his father knew everything he, his son, wished to know and had a right to know. Now was the time, if ever, and he was indifferent to what pain his words might inflict.

"I shall never forget," he continued, "the feeling I had when I saw that teaspoon up at the Huttons'. The shock of complete

amazement was followed by a curious impression that I had been there, in that very house, often before. Everything seemed so familiar; and, by Jove, father, I've seen that place before in my dreams, and Miss Forsythe." And the young man sprang from his chair and paced the room excitedly.

"You've a bit of Jersey marsh fever, from my way of thinking. Come, boy, sit down and don't give way to—to—well, nothing, I should say." And his father motioned to him to be seated, but all the while he steadily gazed at the mantel and to a picture of the ship he had last commanded.

"I don't care to sit down, but will if you say so. See here, father, is there any good reason why, now that I am a man grown, I should not know something, if not all, of my early history?" And Ellwood spoke in a quiet, pleading way, very different from his early outbursts of indignation and excitement.

"There is no blot on it, and why is not that enough to know?" replied Captain Walter, impatiently.

"Because I am not a Walter, and everybody in Wilmington knows it, and I am a nobody-knows-who, and everybody knows that!" exclaimed Ellwood, with equal impatience.

"And has it ever been thrown up to you?" the old man asked.

"Never."

"And it never will be while I am alive, nor after I'm gone, either. Isn't it, after all, handsome is as handsome does? Won't the world take you at your own measure, and not see if you fit your grandfather's old clothes. Would you be more of a man if you were somebody else's son instead of mine?" And Captain Walter's pride came to the fore as he spoke. "I come of a good line, but it wouldn't have saved my neck if I'd murdered my neighbor. I didn't expect you to get glum over a trifle. I've tried to make a man of you, and now it's for you to show I didn't bungle at the job. You have been carefully brought up and put through college and have more money than you need to live like a gentleman, and coming in for

all that I have my grip on yet. What more can you ask?" And the old man's voice got very shaky.

"I do not feel as if I had a name," Ellwood said, rather mournfully.

"You have mine!" thundered Captain Walter. "Mine, boy, mine!"

"Yes, and I have you to thank for it; but in one sense it is not my name. Was it ever made so by legal means? Perhaps I was baptized before you took me."

"If so, Ellwood, I rebaptized you, when as my son you were given my name, my care through all your tender years, and I crowned the gift with a fortune."

"There, there, father, don't talk in that way. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but there is such a yearning in my heart to know more about myself. I scarcely know why." And the son showed he was as much affected by the discussion as his old father.

"My boy, there are reasons——" Captain Walter remarked, after a rather lengthy pause.

"Yes," interrupted his son, "I am con-

vinced of that, and the more so since my evening at Hutton Hall in Jersey. I saw there the eleven spoons that only need my one to make up the original dozen."

"You saw what?" gasped Captain Walter.

His son repeated what he had just said and saw, as he did so, that his father flushed and grew pale by turns. The old gentleman was evidently excited to a dangerous degree and gasped, scarcely audibly, "Not now, not now," and rising with some effort from his chair, with tottering steps, left the room.

Ellwood Walter was thoroughly frightened and sprang up to follow, but when he reached the door through which his father had passed, the old man turned and said, in the same nervous, unnatural way, "Not now, not now,—don't come, don't come." His son stood watching him until he passed out of sight at the bend of the stairs, and then he listened to his father's footsteps, and by the sound could trace his movements. It was evident to him that his father crossed the room and sat down in front of his desk in the chimney corner. Then all was quiet.

The young man—the "nameless" young man, as he foolishly had called himself—was left to his own thoughts. Was he to be forever baffled? Impatiently he paced to and fro, stopping at times to listen for footsteps overhead. Suddenly a bright idea came to him. If he could learn nothing from his father, might not the Huttons be able to throw some light on the subject? and it was not long before he fancied himself strolling along that banked meadow at Hutton Place discussing "identity" with Miss Ethel.

He began laughing to himself or at himself, it would be hard to say which, and ended by saying aloud, "What did that chatterbox mean in the Philadelphia book-shop? I never saw her before, or she me, I guess. Nottingham must be a great place for gossip; but what place isn't where there are women about?" he added, contemptuously. But this snarl did not include Miss Ethel Hutton. He set her apart in all his flings at woman, and wondered why he did so.

Like every young man, Ellwood Walter had to pass through this stage of distorted

views of life, which is generally corrected, fortunately for the world at large, when the Jill of each Jack comes upon the scene; but misery follows when recognition does not lead to love. There never was an old bachelor or an old maid that could pass unscathed through the refining fire of just criticism. His unchecked thoughts were all in sunny paths, and so Ellwood Walter's cheerfulness returned, and he was about to go to his father's room and say that he would not bring up the subject again, when he heard the heavy tread of the old gentleman overhead, and knew that he was coming downstairs again.

When he entered the room he had so tragically left some time before, he looked more serious and careworn than was usual to him, but assumed to be cheerful, if he did not feel so, as he remarked, "I will tell you something, my boy, that may go a good ways towards satisfying you, and it won't take long. There is, in the first place, no blot on you; all the stain rests on me, and are you willing that I should degrade myself,

even in your eyes, for the sake of satisfying your curiosity? You needn't hesitate to give your name to any girl, if there's a girl in the question. There's no cleaner name than Walter in Delaware, or up in Jersey either." And the old captain looked at his son very intently as he spoke; for while in his own room alone it had occurred to him his son might have been stabbed by a pair of bright eyes during his recent journey.

It is needless to say that Ellwood Walter was bitterly disappointed. When his father began he was naturally filled with joyous expectation, which was not realized in any sense by his father's concluding remarks. He bit his lips and twisted his feet about, and clenched his fists, and all the while kept a smiling countenance. What else could he do? He had every reason to be thankful for the home that always had been his, and grateful for the care bestowed on and interest shown in him. So far as he could recall, every reasonable wish had been gratified and many a one anticipated. His friends knew him as "the lucky Walter heir," and

yet to-day he was thoroughly miserable. At this trying moment, when his father sat near him, expecting a reply, he could not find words with which to satisfy both his father and himself. No single sentence covering the whole ground was within his knowledge of language. Captain Walter's admission of wrong-doing pointed, in Ellwood's mind, to having been stolen from his parents, and that his father knew who they were and perhaps where they were, and would not tell. Thought after thought came crowding in upon him until he was positively bewildered and quite forgot where he was.

His father remarked, after some minutes of patient waiting, "Well, what have you to say, Ellwood, my boy?" but the son did not hear the father speaking. He was living, just then, in a world of conflicting ideas and emotions, and had nothing to do with actualities. He felt he could not live with this uncertainty forever before him, and did the "not now" his father had said mean that at some time the secret would be divulged? He doubted it; and then pictures of Not-

tingham, the Huttons, and the silver spoon loomed up, and behind them a legion of grinning imps that made faces at him. When in his most desperate mood and everything looked black as a thunder-cloud, a startling idea came to him, and, looking up with eager gaze into his father's face, he said, "Am I Ethel Hutton's brother?"

"No, my son, you are not; but no more, no more. I am an old man now, and why should the mistake of so long ago, or crime, or whatever people might call it, be brought up to me now? You were no sufferer by it. The time will come——" And saying this, Captain Walter broke down.

Resting his head on the edge of the table, he made a motion with his hand that he could say nothing further and desired to be left alone. Ellwood could only do as requested, and quietly left the room.

Later in the day father and son met again, and with at least assumed cheerfulness on the part of both; but Ellwood Walter had some reason, he thought, for taking a less

dismal view of the situation. As he often said of himself, he was just a bit superstitious, if not a genuine son of a sailor, and a butterfly had lit upon the brim of his hat while out walking, and then he had looked through a fence and seen a four-leaved clover, which he finally picked and now carried with him. He argued from this that the subject of the morning's discussion would be again brought up, but in a different way, and no unpleasant feature abruptly terminate it. A dozen topics came up and a new trip to New York was planned,—Ellwood seeing himself halting overnight at the Horse-Head Inn and a stroll down the lane to Hutton Hall was very vivid,—and finally when he was beginning to feel a little doubtful about his "signs" and longing for a real rabbit's foot, his father said, "I have been thinking a good deal about our talk this forenoon, and you are right."

Ellwood Walter's heart gave a thumping beat, and the young man, leaning forward, eagerly, over the table, said, "Yes?"

"I have all along," his father continued,

"intended some day to tell you all I know, or else leave it in writing; but I might as well do it now as wait. I took you from your nurse, with her consent, and brought you up. The poor woman had two to take care of, and our compact was that neither she nor her husband was to tell me who you were, or let me know in any indirect way about you. We were on our way to Philadelphia; and when we landed, I took you, asking no questions, and here you are. I can't swear to anything, except I took you for my son, and so you've been, and I'm mighty sorry you are not satisfied. Of course I did wrong, but I wanted a son, and you took my fancy as a big-eyed baby that laughed when I came near you; and the nurse was eager for my gold. The wrong of it all can't be righted after all these years, and you haven't suffered that I can see."

"It isn't a matter of money, father; hang money! I'd a deal rather be poor than forced to ask myself all the time who the mischief am I? You hinted about a girl in

the question; hang girls! I am going to solve the problem of who I am if I've got to wander to the world's end, and have no time nor inclination for ladies' society. There's too much risk of being snubbed as a nobody," replied Ellwood, bitterly.

"Is it being nobody to be my son?" asked Captain Walter, haughtily.

"But I am not."

"You are in fact, if not according to the tweedledum and tweedledee of law and all that. I couldn't go to court with a baby in my arms and say just how I came by it. Doesn't twenty-odd years give me some sort of right of possession?"

"Not if I was stolen."

"Stolen! You were bought; but for Heaven's sake let's——"

"Bought of a nurse, as I understand it, without the parents' consent," muttered Ellwood, contemptuously; "why, father, you don't even know how old I am."

"You were born in 1780, I can swear to that," Captain Walter replied, with some trace of anger in his voice.

"But you said you didn't know anything about me," persisted Ellwood.

"Well, only that,—only that." And the old gentleman showed that his excitement, due to discussion, was too much for him. He began to tremble violently and his son was afraid he might have apoplexy. His face was fearfully flushed and breathing labored.

For a long time neither spoke, and when mental quiet was in some degree restored, Ellwood Walter said, in a very gentle, assuring way, "Father, I will not bring up this subject again. I am satisfied with what I know now."

Captain Walter looked up at his son with an expression of great relief and held out his hand, Ellwood clasped it. Not a word was spoken, and father and son were again at peace.

Chapter VIII

Ethel and Cæsar

Better the advice of an old head than the impulse of a young heart.

ETHEL did have a headache the morning after the tea with its dramatic incident of the lost teaspoon; an incident of which hereafter she was forever to be reminded when a teaspoon was before her. Her headache doubtless came from hard thinking, a vivid dream, and reckless devouring of Cynthia's biscuit, that bribed the palate and turned traitor in the stomach. Mr. Ellwood Walter had proved to be something out of the ordinary: a problem to be solved. Most young men, in Ethel's estimation, were easily seen through; all there is of them shows upon the surface, and few of them call for more than a second glance. Too often, she had found, given their names and

there they end. Here was an exception. The glamour of mystery hung about him. He was an adopted child and evidently the heir of a wealthy man. He unconsciously bore evidence of this in all he said and did.

"I have never met before a really rich young man," Ethel said to herself, after breakfast, when she escaped her aunt and wandered by a circuitous route to the old chestnut, "and there is a wonderful difference between him and the young men I see at meeting on first and fifth days. Of course it is not proper to dwell upon it, as aunt would say and the preachers preach, but it is a positive pleasure to meet such people. It is good to be lifted above the humdrum of daily life. Poor fellows, it is not their fault, but the young Friends around Crosswicks are so much alike. There isn't one that can get his head above the dead level of mediocrity. They are all floundering in that monotonous sea with only strength enough to keep their noses in the air."

Ethel laughed a little as she sat down,

recalling experiences she had with the brothers of her girl friends. "It is all very wicked," she continued; "but this strange young man is so different, and what the young Friends of the meeting never did, he gave me a headache. I would have to study up if I met him often." And then Ethel began to look serious. Instead of seeing him often, she remembered she was not likely to see him again, unless he brought that old teaspoon.

The day was well fitted for her musings. The cricket's drowsy creaking filled the air, and only from far away came the song of some solitary bird; like her, perhaps, musing because of the approaching close of the gay summer. A solitary crow came to the tree in the shade of which she sat, and choosing a perch directly over her, rolled out its autumn call that foretells the falling of the leaf.

"Come, old croaker," she called back, "don't give me a fit of the blues by your dismal chatter." Hearing her, the bird flew off with a great clatter of half-articulated protests. Ethel was amused at its consternation,

and indignation too, and waved it a good-bye which was continued as a welcome to a pretty titmouse that lisped a prediction of continued sunshine.

"You dear creature, please stay by me. I'm in need of a cheerful friend this morning, for I've a task to perform not much to my liking. Now why, pray tell me, should an accidental meeting with a stranger ruffle the quiet current—very quiet current of Huttonian life? Dear me, how aunt would scold if she knew how I was rattling on about nothing! Wouldn't I have a book put in my hands, or—no, not that way now, but a book suggested? I do wish Helena Laurie would get back from the city; she makes the young people, women and men, positively interesting by her lively chat. Aunt doesn't quite approve, but then aunt is no longer young. It would be nice to spend a winter in the city, wouldn't it, birdie? Why, where has the creature gone to?" And Ethel looked about for the lisping tit that now was half a mile away. "There, now, what was I saying? Oh, about winter. Well, auntie

doesn't like leaving the Hall, and there's no use in wishing. Funny, but she never gets tired of her neighbors, it seems to me. Neighbor this and neighbor that. Shut them up in a bag and tumble them out, and you won't know one from the other. They've told her the same things since I can remember, and she always looks sober and laughs as if wound up like the hall clock and went by machinery. Dear old auntie, I must stop; but, oh, dear! think of a whole raft of those cheap-jack people from Trenton driving down here and staying to dinner! Why, the men's faces glimmer with intelligence only when you mention a dollar, and I've seen them grow silly with excitement if you mention a hundred. It is cruel to mention a new book to them. Hogg's Tales one of them took literally, with only one g and t-a-i-l-s. Think of aunt scolding because I laughed in his face! And the new school-master! Bless me, if he isn't worth knowing, just to add to one's entertainment. He poses as the champion of every new idea, and when asked to further explain his posi-

tion, has always the excuse that the subject is under, let me see, careful, critical, crucial, exhaustive examination. That is right. His big words appear in the end to exhaust him. What a silence there would be if people took Cæsar's advice, to only look your wisest when you have nothing to say! You preserve your reputation of not being a fool by such a scheme. Oh, dear! right or wrong, I do wish more of the stage passengers would drop in to tea, even if they ate up all auntie's greengages in a week." Here Ethel gave just a little start, thinking she heard voices. She did hear footsteps and a voice, for Cæsar was singing after his fashion, or humming rather, as he was approaching. The old man always insisted that his tunes were original and the words, which no one could make out, were Indian. It was anything but music, and yet not disagreeable; monotonous best expresses it.

It was the usual time for Cæsar to reach the old chestnut in his daily round of the shady nooks, and here he was apt to linger longest, for the shade was ample and he had

but to shift his position a little. His "chestnut smoke," as he called the several fillings of his pipe, was a marked feature of his summer life, and here, if at all, he was apt to take from his pocket a memorandum book, and read over and over some of the entries therein. What they were nobody knew.

Ethel, having plans of her own, had come here in advance, knowing Cæsar would be sure to put in his appearance sooner or later, and surely before she had to return to the house.

"Come, Cæsar; I don't take up all the shade, and so won't interfere with thy plans, only I want to ask a heap of questions and get an answer to every one of them."

"That's a pretty stiff job for a hot day, Miss Ethel, if you ask 'em like you used to do when a child, and not wait for an answer to one before you asked another." And Cæsar laughed, as he seated himself to his satisfaction, to await the ordeal of close, if not cross, questioning.

"Light that precious pipe first, for I don't

trust to thy wits unless thy words are puffed up with smoke," said Ethel, in a half-serious way.

"That's better than being puffed up with pride, Miss Ethel." And Cæsar refilled and lighted his pipe. Then he looked up, and said in his cheery way, "And now for business, Miss Ethel."

"I will wait for an answer this time, thee can be very sure. I'm not going to be put off very easy, either," replied Ethel, with a good deal of decision in her manner. Cæsar had called her questioning "business," and that was precisely what she meant it to be.

Cæsar looked rather sober at the determined young woman's last remark. He understood Ethel very well, and had in this case quite correctly read her thoughts. Mystery and sudden revelations were in the air; all felt it, and no one more than Cæsar. Was that old red wallet to come up again? he wondered. He opened his mouth just a little and brought his jaws together with a vicious little click, which, being interpreted,

signified that he could snap the thread of any discourse just where he saw fit, and would do so. Ethel even could not move him from such resolves.

Cæsar had had continued fear for several days that some demand would be made upon him concerning the many conversations between the late Edmund Hutton and himself. It seemed strange that after the lapse of years, and when he had every reason to believe his knowledge would die with him, that the miserable past should be brought so prominently forward. He had much rather be alone this morning, since Ethel made that remark about persistent questioning; but, unfortunately, a man in his position could not be independent or rude in any way, but Cæsar knew that he could be tactful and not give offence. He had schooled himself in this for many years.

"Now, Cæsar," Ethel began, "in the first place, no teasing. Remember it isn't respectful, and then, what is even of more importance, I am really a good deal bothered. Did thee give any very close attention to the

gentleman who risked my boat and perhaps his life, if he can't swim?"

"I did not, of course, Miss Ethel," Cæsar replied, with some show of spirit.

"Why, 'of course'?"

"Because it is not my place to do anything of the kind."

"True, Cæsar; but he was not an ordinary visitor."

"Really, Miss Ethel, I didn't notice anything extra-ordinary about him.

"Well, I do not know that I did, either, but I really incline to think that thee did. Indeed, I am sure of it."

"Please, Miss Ethel, do not jump at conclusions that concern me, whatever you do as to others," Cæsar remarked, in a quiet way that showed he was in earnest about it.

"Oh, I'm not; only I feel sure thee has an impression," insisted Ethel.

"That's very like yes and no in the same breath. My impression is that he was a young man; am I mistaken?"

"Now, Cæsar, I warned thee at the beginning not to tease. Please tell me what

thee thinks, or thought when thee saw him."

"But, Miss Ethel, it is not my place to give thought to the guests of Miss Margaret or yourself, and I never did." And Cæsar made a pause here for mental reservation as to Fretwell Farnsworth. "He seemed to me a very pleasant, sensible young man that liked fun as he found it out o' doors. He asked about fishing, shooting, the boats, and riding after a fox 'cross country. He seemed to be on the lookout for all that's goin' on. I guess, Miss Ethel, he's better suited when out-doors than sittin' in the house." And Cæsar looked pleased, as if he thought that now his troubles were over.

"Well, perhaps thee is right, but he found something in our house to entertain him anyhow," replied Ethel; "something that made him change like a flash from gay to grave."

"May I ask what it was?" remarked Cæsar, with a countenance expressive of intense curiosity.

"Our teaspoons!" exclaimed Ethel, with

a rippling laugh that was infectious, and Cæsar laughed also in a quiet way.

"Your teaspoons; why, how could they distress him? Did one burn his mouth?"

"They did, in spite of thy surprise, but not as thee suggests," Ethel replied; "he was as quiet as if in pain after talking about one he had that matched them."

"Miss Ethel!" Cæsar said, sharply, evidently much impressed, and then as suddenly he became moody, as might one of his people when defeated in battle.

"Goodness me, Cæsar, I didn't expect to give thee a fit by saying 'teaspoons.' Now thee must tell me what has moved thee so decidedly. I have found out something at last that aunt never told me, and if thee knows more than I do, thee just must tell. Come, now; a nice long story of other days, and all having to do with a poor lost teaspoon."

"Miss Ethel, I can't," replied Cæsar, with considerable emotion; "I cannot, and must ask time to think."

"Now, Cæsar, just see here. I made a

mistake, it seems, in asking Mr. Walter to tea, and another blunder in telling thee about it, and aunt doesn't want to talk. I will know if there's anything in it that concerns me; and thee must tell me what thee knows. I don't care what thee thinks about things, but what does thee know, now, about our teaspoons?"

"One was lost, I've heard say, about the time your father—— or, when—— well, some twenty years ago and more——"

"That is enough, Cæsar," interrupted Ethel; "it is quite plain thy plan is to deceive me. I am positive now thee knows all about it."

"All about what?" Cæsar asked, seriously.

"Why, the teaspoon, of course," replied Ethel, petulantly.

"Indeed, Miss Ethel, I do not," insisted Cæsar; "I only wish I did."

"Why?"

"Because it might explain——" And he stopped abruptly, feeling he had said too much.

"Explain what?" demanded Ethel.

"Come, Cæsar, thee has gone too far now to back out. Explain what?"

"Where did you say he got it?" Cæsar asked, ignoring what Miss Ethel had just said.

"I didn't say, but it was in the West Indies somewhere," Ethel replied, without reference to her demands of a moment before; for it suddenly occurred to her a little less bluntness on her part would prove judicious. It was clearly a case of diamond cut diamond.

"Miss Ethel, my pheasant snares were all sprung yesterday and not a bird in 'em, and I cannot find my rabbit-foot that Coon gave me. I'm not afraid of signs, but somehow I've felt all day as if something was goin' to happen."

"And what has all that to do with thy getting so worked up over a teaspoon lost twenty years ago? If thee really knows anything, will thee tell me or not?" And Ethel felt a little trace of anger rising up, and Cæsar saw it.

"Miss Ethel, you've heard me say your

grandfather sealed my lips for a good reason, and would you care to break the seal? When it is the work of the farm, then you know I am at your command; but just now, remembering your grandfather, I am Cæsar Chesley, and not just a hired man at so much a month. I can't tell you all that I know, because I gave my word that I would not. Your teaspoon stirred up old days, that's all. But I can always tell what I think, providin' my thoughts ain't like keys that unlock the secrets."

"It all gets worse and worse talking to thee, and I may as well give it up," Ethel said, in positively sorrowful tones.

"Miss Ethel," Cæsar remarked, as if to divert her mind to other matters, "have you been after flowers since he was here?"

"Oh, bother the flowers, Cæsar! What is thee thinking about? It's teaspoons, not flowers."

Cæsar tried very hard not to laugh, and said, assuringly, "I have nothing to tell. His story was strange to you; so why should not I be surprised?"

"But it moved thee in a different way. I see it's no use, but I'll not give it up."

Turning away in an impatient manner, that her displeasure might be readily seen by Cæsar, Ethel saw, to her infinite surprise, her aunt standing directly behind her.

"Gracious! how thee startled me, aunt! Has thee been listening?"

"I have heard very little, Ethel dear, and would have spoken had not thy earnestness amused me."

"Well, it is so provoking, aunt; Cæsar won't tell me about the spoon and Mr. Walter. He knows all about it."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Margaret, with astonishment, real or feigned, in her countenance. "Does thee, Cæsar? If so, please tell us."

"I know only this, Miss Margaret, that as Mr. Walter came from the West Indies he might have brought the spoon with him; he might have bought it, or found it, or been given it when he was there, and all that; but as he is a stranger, it seems so queer that at last the spoon should come back."

"But it hasn't, and may not, and then it is possible not to be one of our set at all. It seems to me that Mr. Walter made the spoon an excuse to shorten the evening, and the story he told and what we know of a spoon is a mere coincidence."

"Oh, auntie!" exclaimed Ethel, "I cannot believe that, and Cæsar doesn't. The silversmith made a good many spoons of one pattern and put R. H. on some for some Richard Hunter, perhaps; but Mr. Walter's got our teaspoon, I'm sure."

"And why sure, dear?"

"Oh, I feel it!"

"And so do I," remarked Cæsar, and then he looked frightened. He had not intended to speak, but, as sometimes happened, he thought aloud. It is strange that since his master's death he had unwittingly told no tales.

"Well, we'll wait till we see, Ethel," said her aunt, "before we begin to wonder about it. Mr. Walter will come again, perhaps." And the ladies walked slowly from the old chestnut-tree towards the Hall.

When they were out of hearing Cæsar shook the ashes from his pipe, looked well about him, then slapped his knee and bobbed his head up and down quite visibly. He, at least, was satisfied with the interview.

Chapter IX

The Mystery of Mark Watson

"Murder will out:" 'tis but an idle tale;
Unheard the victim's groan; unseen the blow,
Though the wild shriek was borne upon the gale,
And blood doth stain where lies the victim low.
Though many pass the spot and come and go,
Filled with a fevered wish to trace the deed
To its foul source, yet he may overthrow
Their cunning to the last, and check with speed
The hound upon his path: no succor ask nor need.

By common consent it was made a holiday, and everybody who was so disposed could join in the search for Mark Watson. Perhaps he had run away. Philip Flint insisted strongly upon it, and was conspicuously vehement in his assertions to that effect and disposed to be abusive of those who differed from him. The crowd looked upon his loquacity as the effect of rum, except Cæsar Chesley, who eyed him closely and

determined keeping him in view. There was no reason for Flint being so positive or interested particularly so far as any one knew, and Cæsar became suspicious when he found that the man was perfectly sober, but unduly excited.

Samuel Leake, the pompous lawyer from Trenton, had been at the Horse-Head and publicly announced that he was prepared—by whom authorized he did not say—to offer a reward of two hundred shillings for Mark Watson, dead or alive. How he rolled out the "two hundred" and mouthed the "shillings," making the reward seem as stupendous as it was ridiculous! At all events, his announcement had its effect, and a curious crowd started leaderless, first to Mark's cabin and then to search through the intricacies of Bear Swamp. There were dogs, too, in abundance, and, although early in September, scarcely a man among them but was ready to forget the proper object of their search to shoot any rabbit or quail that the uncontrolled curs might flush, and soon, in fact, half the gathering of man-hunters

became literally coon-hunters, when the dogs treed one of these animals.

Cæsar Chesley went along, in a deliberate way, not to hunt, but to study the hunters. If Mark Watson had been murdered and the murderer was present, he fancied he could detect him. Philip Flint might know more than he dared to tell, but was not himself the man. A weighty secret makes a man leaky-mouthed, in spite of all his struggles to appear ignorant. Cæsar took care to hear all that was said, yet never appeared to be listening. The experience he had had with the red wallet naturally made him curious, at least, as to Flint. Was Margaret Forsythe really right in her opinion, and what if he were nearer the truth?

The neat little cabin was mercilessly ransacked, yet nothing was found to throw light on the question. There had evidently been no struggle in the house, and when the crowd came out Cæsar suggested that they make a circle of themselves about the cabin and let the ground be carefully gone over, to see if any trace of him had been left, dropped by

accident, on the ground. Then, near the house, he would examine every bit of grass and shrubbery, to see if marks remained of any struggle. Nothing was discovered by any one in the party nor by himself. To the satisfaction of every one, he pointed out that no twigs were broken on the lilacs or syringas, and no trace of blood was to be seen in the grass. Evidently Mark Watson had deliberately left the house, intending to return, and had taken nothing with him. If not, why should he have locked in his dog? "He expected to return," said Cæsar, and then looked up at Philip Flint, as if expecting some comment. Flint again insisted that "he'd run off, 'cause o' some fuss or other, and forgot his dog; that's all."

"How do you know he had any fuss?" asked Cæsar.

"Don't," replied Flint, surlily; "only I've got as good right to my way o' thinkin' as you have to yourn." And then Philip Flint turned to those who stood around them and said in lower tones, "He needn't think 'cause he lives at the Huttons' he knows every-

thin'. Guess a whole white man's as good as a half Indian."

The crowd laughed.

Cæsar straightened himself and looked inches taller. There was fire in his eyes that made the crowd stand back, and the instant Philip turned and faced Cæsar he felt a blow between the eyes and then found himself full length upon the grass. It was the work of an instant.

The crowd rushed in, and two of the cooler heads, taking Cæsar by the arms, quietly urged him to be quiet. Nothing, they said, was to be gained and much might be lost. The friends of Flint likewise counselled him to make no move towards resenting the blow. He would only suffer the more if he did.

Cæsar acquiesced in his friends' suggestions, but before he made a move in any direction he said, so all could hear him, "Whether Mark Watson ran away or was murdered,—murdered, I say,—if any one can tell anything about it, it's Philip Flint."

"D'ye mean to say I did it? d'ye mean to

say I did it?" exclaimed Flint, wild with rage and fear.

"I mean you don't dare tell the truth," replied Cæsar; and he turned away. The better element wished him to remain and have Flint go home, but he would not listen to it. What had happened to Mark Watson was nothing to him anyhow, and there were too many on the trail to bag any game worth the having.

Leaving the crowd that was now without any well-defined purpose and no leader, Cæsar took a different route towards his home and skirted about Flint's cabin, marking the appearance of everything; yet had a stranger been with him, he would not have seen any movement indicative of especial interest.

Suddenly Cæsar stopped and, listening a moment, sank silently into a dense cluster of underbrush at the side of the narrow path he was then following. Footsteps, a moment later, were plainly heard by him, and then, as he anticipated, Philip Flint passed by. He was muttering to himself, but not

so Cæsar could make out his words, but his manner showed plainly that the occurrence of an hour before had made a deep impression. Cæsar was now more than ever convinced that if any one knew the truth, or any part of it, Philip was the man. But how much did he know? Certainly he could not have had any reason in quarrelling with the missing man; and who would make a partner of such a fellow as Flint in any dark doings?

Cæsar waited until the man had passed by, and had so far gone on ahead as to make it safe to follow. He did not wish to have an encounter with him, and particularly at this time anything like a renewal of the quarrel would be counter to all his plans. Out of idle curiosity in part, and because of that red wallet incident, he would like to solve the mystery of Mark Watson, because somehow he associated the two affairs, yet, for the life of him, he could not tell why. He was not one with those whose interest centred about the two hundred shillings that sounded to them so like the wealth of the Indies, and

to many meant, if they got it, being drunk all winter. The rank and file of the tavern-loungers were a hard set.

The result of this sudden outbreak of interest was precisely what might be expected, a great noise and nothing else. As the day wore on, one by one the men dropped from the ranks, and it finally dawned upon the minds of the most determined that a walk in the woods might be very pleasant, but in the way they were going it could never be profitable. So it came about that the crowd finally reassembled towards sunset at the Horse-Head, and the proprietor wished that Lawyer Leake would soon come again and be the cause of such a senseless gathering, for he profited by it enormously. No one seemed to notice that Philip Flint was not present.

Cæsar found it so pleasant to lie on the yielding sphagnum and chew the sweet bark of the spice-wood and other shrubbery within reach, that considerable time elapsed before he thought of continuing his homeward

walk. Everything about him was suggestive of meditation, for not a bird came near, and only solitary crows, far overhead, broke the silence. The steady hum of insects was not loud and distracting as in the fields. He felt as if he could have and would have no better opportunity to go over recent events, and so he proposed to make excellent use of it. As the time passed, the *pros* and *cons* were carefully weighed, and a good deal of rubbish that had intruded itself upon his attention was summarily dismissed. What, indeed, had become of Mark Watson was not a matter of so much importance in his mind as the seemingly simpler problem: who was Fretwell Farnsworth? Though it was so illogical, perhaps, these two men had been constantly associated in his mind ever since he had seen the latter, a short time ago. He had been as a nightmare to him. His figure rather than his face was constantly before him, and it was a source of annoyance, and yet, what was a stranger to him, that he should give him a second thought? But Fretwell Farnsworth was not to be dismissed

in any such manner. He did not seem to him like a stranger, and while the matter was thus running on in his mind Cæsar suddenly became very still, and even rigid. He stared at vacancy, as if dead, and then, a chilling perspiration breaking out all over him, he suddenly raised one arm and, bringing his hand down violently on his knee, exclaimed, "I know——"

What more he might have said must remain an inference, for as he spoke he heard footsteps, and, Indian-like, sank out of sight in the moss and leafy twigs, and, remaining absolutely motionless, he saw Philip Flint pass by, holding a few bits of paper in his hand. Now, this ignorant backwoodsman was not one to have any papers in his possession. He could neither read nor write, and had never more than passed by a schoolhouse when a child. An axe, a gun, a trowel, and a flail were the four tools with which he had gained his livelihood, and no man in the neighborhood could fell a tree, bring down a deer, build a stone wall, or thresh rye better than Philip Flint. Like

many another of his time, he was too fond of apple-jack and was a nuisance when intoxicated. There was in his earlier days a wonderful difference between Philip drunk and Philip sober; but now, an old man, he was habitually crusty. He was suspicious of everybody, and nobody had any confidence in him. Cæsar alone questioned if the change was brought about by rum. Philip was known to be without property other than his cabin and its few simple belongings, and so to see him carrying what appeared to be written documents and continually muttering to himself at once roused Cæsar to action. He determined to follow, and proceeded so stealthily that Philip, good hunter though he was, had no hint of it.

Flint turned and twisted through the thick woods and finally stopped at the foot of a large white-oak. Stooping down, he dug a deep hole among the roots, picking the dirt away with a stout knife.

To bury papers, which he could have effectually destroyed by fire, was evidence enough that he thought they might be of

use to him; so Cæsar reasoned, or else the man was directed to conceal but not make away with them; and then Cæsar's mind was filled with all sorts of ideas as to what it all meant. The critical moment came, as he watched Flint place the papers in the hole. Should he wait and remove them after the old man had gone, or announce his presence and seek an explanation? In an instant the matter was considered, and he chose the latter plan of action. He crouched, like a cat making ready to spring upon a mouse, and then, giving a wild yell, sprang forward. Philip was startled and fell backward. His surprise overpowered him, as Cæsar had calculated, and before he could collect his thoughts the wily Indian had wrenched his knife from him. Then, standing aside, he said, very quietly, "No harm, Philip, only I want to see the papers before you bury 'em."

"See 'em," growled Philip, with an oath; "see 'em, but if they get me into trouble I'll work you for it."

Cæsar glanced hastily at them, and saw they were the missing ones so long preserved

in the old red wallet. "How did you come by them, Phil?" he asked. "Did the stranger give them to you?"

"What stranger?"

"The man that was at the Horse-Head back a bit and wanted to buy the Hutton place," Cæsar replied.

"Never heard nothin' of him," Philip growled in return.

"But you don't say how you got 'em; these papers came from the Hall."

"Why, that brat o' mine took somethin' like a pocket-book out o' your room when I was mendin' the chimney, and 'fore I knowed it had it home. I sent him back with it next day, but he played hookies and threw it away, near as I can tell. These came out of it, and we found 'em later. The old woman, says she, 'Say nothin'; it's rubbish anyway;' but somehow I got a bit worked up when you talked about Mark, and thinks I, I'll bury 'em, and if folks come 'round thinkin' I did Mark, they may be o' some use; but I tell you I didn't have nothin' ag'in him."

"All right, Phil, I take your word, and I'm mighty glad to get the papers back. We got the wallet and the others all right. Let's call it square, old fellow, and you shut up and I will."

"I'll take y'r hand on it, Cæsar." And they clasped hands with a vice-like grip.

Cæsar took the shortest route for home. He had been wrong about Fretwell Farnsworth, and Miss Margaret was right. Was he wrong about the other idea he'd got while sitting in the woods? His confidence in his detective judgment had been shaken by Philip Flint's straight story, and what was he to think?

"The fellows about the tavern can go Mark Watson hunting on their own hook; I've got something else to look after," Cæsar said aloud, though to himself only; and from that moment gave no further thought to the mystery of Mark Watson.

Chapter X

Counsel and Client

Oh, what a wealth of wisdom in gray hairs,
  And pompous look and deep chest-heaving sigh!
Why does the earth not tremble when he stares
  Out from his dingy den upon the sky,
And green grass wither should he chance to frown,
And June's bright roses fade to wintry brown?

In response to the request from Samuel Leake, Esq., that some time in the near future she would call at his office to consider a matter that concerned her in a non-professional way and interested others, though not to the extent of legal entanglement,—in response to this formidable letter that seemed to hint at a great deal and might mean very little, Margaret Forsythe went to Trenton. There was nothing in the place to attract any one. To go there was always a matter of necessity and not of choice. In one corner an air of exclusiveness had

settled, and when it was penetrated the result was to find—exclusiveness. No one ever retired with a headache from being too intellectually entertained; and as to the rest of the town, it appeared to be true, as a visitor had irreverently said, "The Lord ran out of brains when he got to Trenton and stuffed their heads with tow."

A servant drove Mrs. Margaret Forsythe in the cumbersome Hutton gig directly to Samuel Leake's, a single halt being made at John Whitaker's on Mill Hill. The Leake mansion was a striking affair. The roof, with its angles and huge dormers, gave it such a heavy look that you felt sure at least half of the house had been pushed into the ground. The ceilings were absurdly low, the windows small, and there was that air of general dinginess that seemed quite fitting to its male occupant, but scarcely accorded with his cheerful daughters, who probably danced a good deal in the sunshine that kindly lingered all day in the big back-yard.

But if the house as a whole was a dingy affair, how much more so was the office of

Samuel Leake, Counsellor-at-Law! This man had his hobbies, three of them,—law, lavender, and pennyroyal,—and the combined odor of musty books, innumerable mildewed parchments, and his favorite herbs was overpowering. To Margaret Forsythe it was simply intolerable, and she had said so more than once.

"But I have lived so long among them, Mrs. Forsythe, that they and I are one," remarked the old lawyer, when she demanded fresh air.

"And that is no reason why I should die among them, and I won't. Let us go out into the garden to talk," she replied, with a firmness that meant everything.

How he stared and frowned and cleared his throat! but she was Margaret Forsythe: his match at any game, and he knew it; so he followed her, in spite of himself, drawn as a magnet draws iron filings, as he said afterwards apologetically to his daughters. "Yes, I was pulled out into the yard and was helpless as a baby. She's a wonderful woman." There for a full hour he sat, and

was the more annoyed for that his neighbors looked over the fence at him in blank astonishment.

In this instance, fortunately for him, his office was a little fresher than usual. During a brief absence his daughter Clary had seen to it that the place was aired and dusted, and his bunches of dried herbs were not so prominently in evidence. The visitors' chairs had even been beaten, and so were not likely to soil the occupant's dress. All this was at once noticed by Margaret, and she allayed Samuel Leake's fears at once by making herself comfortable in a really easy chair and showing she was satisfied with her surroundings. He had been looking furtively out of the back-window from the moment she entered. She had noticed this and was just a little moved to tease him, but charity prevailed, and she relieved his fears by her actions and without referring to their one-time garden consultation.

Samuel Leake cleared his throat indefinitely, as if the dust of ages lodged therein, and while passing a few commonplaces, pro-

ceeded to untie a large packet of papers that appeared to have a half-mile of red tape wound about them. Every knot he came to was a "hard" one. The very name of "slip"-knot was objectionable to Samuel Leake, he was so extremely cautious. Finally, the concluding clearing of the throat was accomplished, and the grim lawyer opened the business of the hour with the remark, "For the first time in my professional career I am disposed to hesitate. The late Mark Watson, presuming he is dead, left with me at or about the time of his leaving Hutton Hall to take up his residence in the, I presume, permanently deserted cabin in Bear Swamp a certain document, sealed by himself at the time of delivering it; requesting me to keep it with certain other documents, the contents of which were known to me, and requested, verbally, that the sealed document should not be opened until I was reasonably satisfied of his death, and then to act according to my own discretion. Now this, Mrs. Forsythe, as you will see, brings up three important

considerations. He had, if you choose to so consider it, a forewarning of his sudden taking off by another's hand or by his own; that his death would affect some other individual vitally, and his entire confidence in my judgment." And Samuel Leake drew back in his chair as he concluded his remarks, expanded his chest to the utmost and cleared his throat.

"And accepting these statements in all the seriousness with which you have presented them," replied Margaret, unconsciously imitating the lawyer, "pray inform me how, in what manner, directly or otherwise, they interest myself. I was not aware that Mark Watson, dead or alive, and myself were in any way related, either in a business or social way, or in any degree of cousinship."

"Too hasty, Mrs. Forsythe, too hasty," replied the lawyer, with more earnestness and less pomposity than usual. "Please remember first, that as your counsel and friend and friend of your father, his executor with yourself, that I could naturally have two purposes in asking you to come here. One was

to consult with you,"—here Margaret opened her eyes,—" and again, excuse me,"—for once Samuel Leake smiled,—" you have yet, if you kindly permit, to hear the contents of this sealed document, which no one has seen but myself."

Margaret Forsythe quickly saw her haste and admitted it.

" Of course," she replied, " woman-like, I jumped headlong at conclusions——"

" And woman-like," he remarked, quietly, " you usually light upon your feet."

Margaret acknowledged the compliment, and then the business of the meeting fairly began.

With no further preliminaries, Samuel Leake took up the document and read as follows:

" Samuel Leake, Esq., Lawyer, of Trenton, N. J. I place this day in your hands, with other papers, this sealed one, which, as you will doubtless recall, was to remain sealed until after my death, and then I wish you to inform such as should know the facts (in your opinion) that, first, when I left the

West Indies I was accompanied by my wife and——"

Bang! went the huge brass knocker, and the lawyer put down the document and looked up, as if the person who knocked would immediately step into the office. Both he and Margaret heard the front door open and a stranger's voice, and then, as he had expected, the office door slowly opened. Mr. Leake arose as it did so, and Margaret half inclined her head in that direction. She fancied that she recognized the voice, and, turning again, was not so greatly surprised to see Fretwell Farnsworth standing in the room. He bowed and smiled, but showed his surprise, nevertheless, at seeing her there, while she wondered why he should have called. Had he been to the Hall, and was it to see her?

Having introduced himself, Samuel Leake invited him to an adjoining room, and in the slight confusion incident to the interruption Margaret's eyes wandered to the paper that the lawyer had been reading. She did not intend doing anything of the kind, but her

eyes fell upon the heavy black writing on the page, and she saw that following the words "my wife and" was the word "daughter." She felt very strangely for the moment. She had never heard of such a child, and was at once beginning a long train of unsupported suppositions, when Mr. Leake succeeded in recalling her to herself by saying, "Mr. Farnsworth will call again." But Margaret was not disposed to prolong her own stay.

"No," she replied; "Mr. Farnsworth comes from the city, I believe, and has made a journey to see you. I can come again at any time, as it is not so long a ride, like that Mr. Farnsworth has in the stage."

"But he has already gone, Mrs. Forsythe," replied the lawyer.

"I am so sorry, but really I must go. And bowing and by a manner that would brook no exceptions being taken to her decision, she left Mr. Leake to his law, lavender, and pennyroyal.

Margaret passed to the parlor, where she found Miss Clary, and chatted with that brisk little body for a few minutes, asking

about church affairs, as if she too was a Presbyterian, and then walked down the street to where she knew her gig was waiting. Her order was, as she entered it, "Drive straight home." And settling herself in the vehicle to her satisfaction, she spent the whole time from Trenton to Hutton Hall wondering whatever became of Mark Watson's daughter, and it was not until she alighted, with Cæsar's assistance, and was about to enter the house that she concluded the child must have died in early infancy on shipboard.

After dinner was practically over and during the absence of the attending servant, Ethel asked, "What did Lawyer Leake want, auntie; or was it something very important and I am not to know?"

"He told me, first, what he tells every one he meets," replied Margaret, with a smile that showed how much Samuel Leake had amused her; "he told me he was the most important man in America; this by his manner, of course."

"And didn't you dispute it, auntie?" Ethel asked, with much earnestness, for she thought of the Huttons, of whom she had heard so much.

"I did by my manners, possibly, dear; but this is something that merely impresses for the moment and is soon forgotten."

"Perhaps," replied Ethel, in a way that showed she had some doubt about it. "How I'd like to see this man, who is from thy account so very pompous! Seems to me I'd feel like sticking a pin in him."

"Yes," said Margaret, laughing, "that is my feeling always; but this harmless weakness of his does not affect his judgment. He began to tell me a long story about Mark Watson, though why I cannot say, and just as he was getting interesting Fretwell Farnsworth came in."

"Fretwell Farnsworth!" exclaimed Ethel. "Goodness, auntie, what did he want?"

"I am sure I do not know, but the man's looks were so changed from when he was here that I think I shuddered, and I came away, telling Mr. Leake I would come

again. I could feel the man looking at me as if his eyes were coals that burned me, and I turned my back as soon as possible. All I learned of Mark Watson was that he had a daughter——"

"A daughter?" repeated Ethel.

"Yes, dear, a daughter that must, of course, have died on shipboard, for I never heard Mark's wife speak of one, or Mark either, did thee?"

"Never, auntie; more mystery. It seems as if we were having nothing else to think about but these revelations or resurrections or what you choose of the unhappy days when papa disappeared. I do wish I knew nothing about them or else everything. What, auntie, does thee know that I do not?"

"Nothing, Ethel; nothing that I can think of."

Ethel saw she had been unwise in questioning her aunt. There was something, she believed, included in that "nothing I can think of,"—something she had in her memory and tried not to think of. Why,

though, should she give it so much thought? Were the effects of the sins of her forefathers to be visited upon the children? Bah! she would believe no such foul rubbish as that. She was sure her father had made a miserable failure of life; but she had not, and how could she be responsible for deeds done before she was born? All this she had heard preached, time and again, at Crosswicks meeting, but she had never met one fool enough to believe it applicable to herself or himself.

Ethel looked up when her meditations ceased, and across the round table she saw that her aunt was gazing at her with a puzzled expression, and felt that she had been doing so for several moments. She was a little disturbed by the discovery, Margaret's searching look was so unusual. "Do, auntie," she said, "do stop looking at me so. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, dear. Was I staring at thee?" And Margaret's expression immediately changed to what Ethel considered as natural to her.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Ethel, "I do wish the world would keep away from here. We were happy as larks until that man came, and so much seems to have gone wrong since."

"What man, dear?" her aunt asked.

"Why, Fretwell Farnsworth, of course. Who else has been here?"

"Mr. Walter, my dear," replied Margaret, with much amusement; "surely thee has not forgotten him." And her aunt put much emphasis on the last word.

"Oh, bother *him!*" replied Ethel, impatiently; "yes, I had forgotten *him.*"

"Why, Ethel dear, isn't that a fib?" asked her aunt, with mock solemnity.

"No, no, no; Mr. Walter was quite forgotten—when I spoke."

"Oh; well, then, I am mistaken and surprised." And Margaret arose from the table and, turning, stood looking out of one of the windows, and unconsciously drummed with her finger-tips on the deep sill. She was lost in thought. There was no meadow or garden or trees before her, but a panorama filled with people, dead and living, and in

the foreground of her fancy Mr. Walter and Ethel were in earnest conversation.

Ethel came slowly up to her aunt and, putting an arm about her waist, said, in serious tones, almost an earnest supplication, "Auntie dear, won't thee please think aloud when I am in thy thoughts?"

"Does thee suppose thee is ever out of them?"

"Why, yes, at times. How could I be in them when thee's scolding Cynthia about the burnt pie-crust?"

"Thee knows, dear, what I mean. I never forget thee."

"But this is avoiding my question, auntie, and I'm serious about it. Thee has so many sobering thoughts of late, and I imagine all the time that they are about me."

"Is it strange, dear, that it is so? Thee is not wholly ignorant of the ways of the world. If no one has, there is no reason to think no one will come; and then remember,—

When love shall lend thy fancy wings
  And thrill thee to the heart;
When Cupid's shaft thy bosom stings,
  Then shall we drift apart.

When childhood's love shall fade away,
Thy smile another claim;
When comes at last that fateful day,
Thou wilt not be the same."

"Stop, stop, auntie, or I shall cry outright, and we don't want any trace of a tragedy this bright day. It's all a mistake, and thee doesn't think of me in that way at all. Quoting poetry won't put me off the track. Thee is worried, and about me, and won't tell me the whole truth of the matter. I know it. I feel it." And Ethel showed that she meant every word of what she said.

Margaret did not cease to look straight out of the window for a moment, and then turning, so she could see Ethel's face, continued,—

"Full soon forsaken are the nests,
The nestlings all have flown,—
Peace reigns forever in their breasts,
Nor left, as I, alone."

"Auntie, auntie, please don t say such things. Thee has just spoiled the whole day for me. What makes thee say it? As if I ever had a thought of such a thing."

"Perhaps, dear, I have a keener vision——"

"Miss Margaret, there's a gentleman in the parlor," Cynthia announced; and aunt and niece turned suddenly around, both blushing as if a lover and his sweetheart had been surprised.

"Who?" the ladies exclaimed together.

"D'know, didn't say. An old gen'man from town, I guess. He came in a gig."

"Samuel Leake!" both exclaimed at the same instant.

"I suppose I am not to be present?" Ethel suggested, evidently hoping she might go into the parlor with her aunt.

"No, dear; he wishes to see me alone, I am sure."

"And I did want so to prick the weak joints of his armor; I feel so ugly to-day," Ethel said, in a merry way, that showed her cheerfulness had returned. "I'll go vent my spleen on Cæsar while thee beards the lion in our den." And Ethel left her aunt.

Samuel Leake rose from his chair and greeted Mrs. Forsythe very cordially as she

entered the room, making the latter feel, to her amusement, as if she was in his house, and not he in hers. Then, in a peculiarly solemn manner, he cleared his throat, as if, as some one had said, it were a command to the world to pay attention; and then he proceeded to say, in sepulchral tones, "Good-afternoon. Our recent interview was not satisfactory by any means, and the intrusion of a stranger inopportune; but there seems to have been almost a Providential interference in this case, as the aforesaid stranger threw a little light on the mystery. He informed me that Mark Watson had disappeared at his request and had returned to the West Indies for him. Having no family to inform as to his movements, he left without formal leave-taking. I was to have been informed at an earlier day, but Mr. Farnsworth's engagements prevented him from calling earlier."

As Samuel Leake stopped to take a long breath Margaret saw her chance, and said, quickly, "Will thee kindly inform me why I

am placed in possession of all these particulars; how, in short, it interests me or affects my personal affairs?"

"That is precisely,"—and Samuel the pompous cleared his throat,—"that is precisely what I am coming at. ("It's a long journey," Margaret thought.) "It does not affect you so much as your niece. He states, though the document is not a will, but mere expression of desire, that Miss Ethel Hutton shall be placed in possession of his home and such adjoining acres as his deed from Edmund Hutton calls for. As I said, this is not a formal will, and if so, would now be inoperative, because I am positively assured that Mark Watson is not dead, but merely absent."

"Then why is the matter brought up at this time? It seems to me of absolutely no importance, even if Mark Watson was not alive. My niece has no need of a cabin in Bear Swamp while the Hall is my home, and when not mine it will be hers."

"True, very true; and now I am reaching the vital point——"

"Why, Mr. Leake, I thought thee reached it a moment ago."

"Not at all, not at all. As your counsel, I am aware of the purport of your will, and, of course, of your father's. The latter has been duly acted upon years ago, but suppose he was laboring under a misapprehension when he made it——"

"Yes," interrupted Margaret, excitedly; "and if so, if the will was legal and I came by the property in a perfectly straightforward manner and have had all these years peaceful, undisputed possession, what of it? He did no injustice to any one, my brother being dead."

"Precisely; precisely, Mrs. Forsythe; but if it should prove that your brother was not dead——"

"Not dead! Not dead! Well, could Robert resurrected come to dispossess me?"

"Not at all, not at all; but there has been, if I mistake not, a great injustice done to your honorable father, the late——"

"Injustice! Mr. Leake, kindly come to the point you have so frequently approached

and never seem to reach. Just what have you got to say? I do not like this suspense."

"My natural caution, Mrs. Forsythe, and the demands of my profession require——"

"Nothing of me. I wish to know precisely and clearly just what this all means and how I am affected? Can you not speak plainly, for once, like a man and not as a wily lawyer? I promise you in advance I shall answer no questions, but will not tell any tales."

Samuel Leake was very much hurt, and yet it was his own fault. He did not see that Margaret Forsythe forgot at the moment she was a client of his, and so he could not be taking advantage of her. To play the great man did very well among a crowd, but not when dealing with a Hutton. He sadly overreached himself.

"You do me a great wrong by your implied suspicions," he remarked, in a changed and much pleasanter voice. "I did not wish to be too abrupt and startle you by a very comprehensive assertion; and I had in mind, naturally I think, to determine, if I

could, if you had any, or ever had had any, suspicions of what I am now told is the truth concerning your brother."

Margaret softened at these words, and without apologizing in words, showed that she was mistaken and unjustly suspicious. "As thee is my counsel," she said, in a tone that made amends for the earlier remarks, "and I may add my valued friend, I must admit that since Fretwell Farnsworth's visit to the Hall, and the incident of a stranger staying at the inn calling here, I have been unquiet in my mind; yet I can give no solid reasons for it. Mr. Farnsworth had a strange influence over me while we conversed. It was that of a person whom we have known or met before and cannot recall; and then the younger friend, whom Ethel invited in to tea, seemed so like an old acquaintance; and only to-day, while I sat opposite Ethel at the table, she seemed to have totally changed in appearance, and I could not keep my eyes from her."

"Not at all strange, my friend, not at all strange. Believing Mark Watson to be

dead, I opened the package as you know, and therein he states that when he left the West Indies there was with him his wife and infant daughter and the infant son of Robert Hutton. That they sold the latter to the captain of the vessel, and, destroying certain documents and altering another, they placed their own child in the care of the late Edmund Hutton and that she, your supposed niece, Ethel Hutton by custom, is Ethel Watson in fact."

Margaret Forsythe trembled violently, but determined to control herself. Her pride was her main-stay now. She even smiled as she looked at Samuel Leake, but was forced to look in another direction; and then, a little confused in her thoughts, drummed rapidly on the edge of the table near which she sat.

"Have you any comment to make at this stage of my statement?"

"None; not now; go on."

"Unfortunately," Mr. Leake continued, "Mark Watson has omitted, accidentally no doubt, all reference to the name of the

vessel on which he sailed, or its captain, or to give any dates. Have you any papers bearing upon the subject among your father's papers?"

By great effort, though the strain was terrible, Margaret Forsythe forced herself to be calm in appearance; and with scarcely a trace of emotion said, in reply, "The documents you refer to are not in my possession. I have not seen them in years, and as they were supposed to belong really to her, were given over to Ethel. Whatever their apparent defects or crudeness, they seemed to satisfy her grandfather. There was too much rejoicing over Ethel's arrival to be over-critical, and papa, you know, was very much his own lawyer."

"Too much so, too much so, as this proves," said Samuel Leake, impatiently.

"Too much so or not, it is too late to correct that; but let me ask, how came Fretwell Farnsworth in possession of all this astonishing information?"

"He claims to be or to have been a partner of your brother, and is positive he is not

dead. That any information to that effect was forwarded for some dark purpose, and he is still living under an assumed name."

Margaret rose from her chair as Samuel Leake ceased speaking, and said, in so peculiar a manner that the old man was startled, "Has thee told me the exact truth as it is known to thee?"

"Certainly," he replied.

"Then thee must keep this to thyself until I am better prepared to give it further consideration. Fretwell Farnsworth is my brother and Ellwood Walter is his son." Saying this she sank back into her chair unconscious.

The lawyer called immediately for help, and in a moment the servants were in the room. Cynthia was as good a nurse as she was a cook, and by cold water and hartshorn applications soon restored her mistress. Ethel arrived directly after and assumed control. Samuel Leake gave her a few words of explanation and left. The servants were dismissed, and aunt and niece were alone.

Chapter XI

Ethel and Cæsar again

No name so honored but it may be fouled;
None that we cannot brighten by our lives.

MARGARET FORSYTHE was not long an invalid. The gentle care bestowed upon her by Ethel, a long, refreshing sleep, and the soothing thought that Ethel was and should remain her heir, let come what may,—all these things acted as a powerful restorative; but still she hesitated about telling all to her niece. What would be the effect upon her? Margaret continually thought; and her courage failing time and time again, her strength was slightly undermined, and during the second night she was slightly feverish. Ethel was watching her with some solicitude, when she heard her talking in her sleep. Bending over her that she might catch every word, her aunt's secret was made known.

"She is Ethel Hutton to me, my niece; and so it shall be," Margaret muttered, and then fell into a profound slumber that was not disturbed by any dreams; and when in the mellow sunshine of the early morning she awoke, Margaret Forsythe again was well. There was no lack of strength nor of courage, for she saw in an instant that the conditions were reversed, and Ethel was more in need of her care than she of Ethel's. Not that the latter was positively ill; but so changed was her manner, so altered her expression. The clear light of her life's unclouded joy was gone and a strange, vague gaze replaced it; one as if she was endeavoring to see into the unknown. Perhaps Ethel read her aunt's thoughts, as Margaret was constantly reading those of her niece; but now she did not read them correctly, though but two days before she had boasted of a keener vision. They were, without intending it, deceiving each other. Ethel was not merely wonder-struck and doubtful about the immediate future, she was laying deep plans for the change she felt must soon

come, and not even Cæsar had a hint of them as yet. And she was the first to speak to-day of what had happened.

"Thee has no secret from me now, auntie dear; or must I not call thee 'auntie' any more?" And her voice almost broke down to a sob.

"Not call me 'auntie'! Why, what does thee mean? I not thy aunt?"

"No, not any more. I know that I am Ethel Watson now, and have no right here." And she turned her head away that her aunt might not see her face. She looked out of the window, and everything, once so familiar, now looked strange. There was not a tree or bush, or reach of meadow, field or stream, that was the same as it had looked for all the years of her life. It was as if she was in a foreign country, suddenly translated. She had no home; a stranger in a strange land. Yet she kept back her tears. If not a Hutton, she had learned the trick of their pride; she had become very nearly one by breathing the same atmosphere for twenty years. Then she felt sure, too, that she had

friends who would not be appalled at her poverty.

"Ethel, my dear, let me say what is upon my mind now, and never again mention the subject. Now, please listen to all I say and believe it, and banish the last few horrid days from thy thoughts forever. Remember, I say, dear, all that I have is thine." And Margaret Forsythe looked so lovingly at Ethel Watson that she knew how absolutely sincere were her aunt's words.

"Thy view and mine can never be the same——"

"Why does thee not call me 'auntie' when thee speaks? Thee must, thee must," insisted Margaret.

"Auntie dear, then, if thee wishes; and now let me request the same as thee has done. One weighty word and never again spoken. Thy views and mine can never correspond. Thy claim no one disputes; the place is thine, but never, being a Watson, will I accept that which should belong to thy brother's son. He is still alive. I believe he will soon be made known to us.

Surprises are still in the air. We can all of us feel them; and I've a bit of Cæsar's superstition. He worried over the loss of his rabbit's foot. Thee knows, auntie dear, when we fall we strike somewhere. We cannot keep on falling. Even Lucifer landed when he fell from the skies. I only know that I am Ethel Watson, and what that may mean is possibly a question. Thee said, not long ago, the teaspoon affair was a mere coincidence, but I never thought thee really considered it so; and what if Ellwood Walter should prove to be the missing heir?"

"But, Ethel, I have made thee my heir," remarked Margaret, mournfully.

"I know thee did, but because I was thy niece, as thee believed, and I am nothing of the kind, but a mere beggar pampered in the lap of luxury to make my beggary more bitter when sent back to it."

"Ethel, dear Ethel, thee must not say such things," protested her aunt, greatly distressed to hear such a monstrous doctrine even hinted at.

"Why, auntie, it is but the simple truth.

I have a few vague purposes in view, and these I shall consider as to their relative merits, but don't try even to guess where any of them will land me. But all this, after all, is idle talk——"

"Yes, Ethel, 'idle talk'; "that is it exactly. Do let us say no more and think no more about it." And Margaret Forsythe thought with these earnest words that the disturbing element would disappear from out their lives.

"Why, auntie, we cannot put it aside in any such manner. The trouble has come to stay, like Cynthia's rheumatism, and always worse when there's much to do. Thee must see Ellwood Walter, and if what I believe is true, make a new will and him thy heir."

"Never, Ethel; please don't mention it."

"Thee must, auntie; it is only just; and never, never, never will I take Hutton Hall from him." And with these wild words, Ethel stepped closer to her aunt, kissed her again and again, and was gone before Margaret could recover from her surprise.

"Come, Cæsar, don't look so glum because I happen to pounce in upon thee. I know thee can't smoke and talk at the same time, but just now thee must talk, and talk to some purpose. I've been put off too long." And Ethel looked quite forceful enough to secure every demand she made upon the world at large and Hutton Hall's occupants in particular.

"How is Miss Margaret?" asked Cæsar, apparently oblivious to all that Ethel had said.

"Oh, she's quite well again, except a trifle nervous perhaps. I've nursed her through a little touch of fever, and now I want not nursing, but advice."

"Advice!" Cæsar repeated, as she spoke the word, giving his fair petitioner a puzzled look.

"Advice; yes, advice, and good advice, does thee hear? The very best thy wit can give me. Sh! there's no one near, is there?" And Ethel looked about to be sure she was not overheard.

"Cæsar, I told thee I was sure something

was going to happen, everything seemed to be so upside down and queer in every way. I just knew it, and it turns out I'm not Ethel Hutton."

"Not Ethel Hutton!" repeated Cæsar in astonishment, quite forgetting for once in his life to add "Miss."

"No; I'm simply Ethel Watson, whoever she may be." And the girl's voice trembled in spite of all her efforts to be gay.

"Who told you this? Not that thing of a lawyer that came here the other day? He doesn't know as much as he thinks, I can tell him, and he hasn't a mortgage on all creation, has he?"

Ethel had to laugh at Cæsar's description of Samuel Leake, although not couched in properly respectful terms, and said, "No, it was not he that told me, but auntie; and now don't get so excited over it."

"Who told Miss Margaret?" Cæsar asked, in a quick, impatient way that Ethel did not then understand.

"Why, Samuel Leake, the lawyer that you saw."

"And who told him?" Cæsar asked, in the same manner.

"I do not know."

"I do," replied Cæsar, with a trace of triumph in his voice.

"Who?"

"I would rather keep that back," replied Cæsar, more himself again. "What you've told me, Miss Ethel, is no news. I have known it for years."

"Known it for years, Cæsar! What do you mean?"

"Just this: your grandfather was never satisfied that you were his grandchild, and for that reason did not name you in his will, but left all to your aunt. The paper that Mark Watson brought here was not what your grandfather thought it should be. It didn't have the particulars it ought; and he sent it to the city, and there it was found by a man who studied writings that there had been changes made on it; where the word 'he' was put, meaning his grandson, an 's' had been added on to make it read as if it meant you. But he could do nothing in

the matter, and never could get Mark to contradict himself or that wife o' his; so he lived on, year after year, in hopes that the real grandchild would some day come to him and——"

"And what, Cæsar? Do tell me quick or I shall die."

"Miss Ethel, don't say that. When your grandfather saw what you were growing to be like, I say, he hoped his grandson would come back to him and marry you."

"And marry me," repeated Ethel, in a slow, thoughtful way; "and marry me."

"It was not a strange wish, Miss Ethel, and to the day of his death he had that wish. Now, Miss Ethel, my lips are unsealed, but I did not speak before I should. I have not broken my promise to your grandfather."

"Did he tell you this?"

"He did not have to. It was the other way, in fact. I never could see the Hutton in your face that people talked about, and when your grandfather talked about it I said so, and pointed out what I thought: that

you favored Mark Watson's wife; and was it so funny that I did, as you were her own daughter?"

"Who was my mother?" Ethel asked, with some contempt in her manner.

"I do not know."

"Didn't you ever ask her who she was?"

"Never. She would not have told. She had, I think, Indian blood in her veins, and our cold winter killed her. She was never herself, I guess, in this country."

"Who was my father?"

"Why, Mark Watson; you just said so."

"I mean, who was he? where did he come from?" asked Ethel, with much impatience.

"Near Nottingham Square," replied Cæsar, "and a good enough fellow in his way. His life was spoiled when he was young, I know, and he never was good for much after he came back. Always a-moping and suspicious of me, though I used to tell him he needn't be."

"Does thee believe he is dead or a runaway, or what?"

"Dead."

"Why did he run away when a boy?"

"He and your father went off together 'cause they thought they had murdered me."

"Murdered thee!" exclaimed Ethel, with horror.

"Yes; they quarrelled over one of the Laurie ladies, and in the fight killed me, or thought they did; and now, Miss Ethel, is the queer part of it. When your father went down to Willow Bend Island to fight with Mark, one of the children running about handed him a teaspoon he had found, and your father put it in his pocket. When I lay dead, as they thought, your father tried to pry open my mouth and pour something in it, and I know now it was with that spoon. It all came back to me when you told me about Mr. Walter."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Ethel, half lost in wonder at the old man's story; "but, Cæsar, thee keeps saying 'your father'; he was not my father."

"I know, Miss Ethel, but we always have

called him so, for your and Miss Margaret's sake. Your grandfather made me mighty careful to do it. Well, the rest's soon told. Your grandfather found me, and fetched me back to life and——"

"And what, and what? Don't keep me waiting."

"Here I am." And Cæsar laughed heartily.

"And, Cæsar, did thee tell grandpa—no, Mr. Hutton, the exactly true story? Is thee sure?"

"I did, Miss Ethel, and he made me promise to tell no one; he sealed my lips, as he called it."

"And thee *knows* I am Ethel Watson?"

"Yes, Miss Ethel, I believe it."

"Thee needn't bother about the 'miss.' I'm nobody, named Ethel Watson."

"Nobody!" repeated Cæsar, with startling emphasis. "Nobody! Miss Ethel, as compared with other folks you are everybody, and I pity the man who says you are nobody in my hearing. That musty old lawyer with his nose in other people's business

has done all this mischief. Things were working out all right and no harm would 'a' come of it all if he hadn't bothered himself about things. What good does it do him to make Miss Margaret and you miserable?" And Cæsar muttered something that Ethel knew was an oath. He always swore under his breath and with his eyes, that fired up, like blowing on dull coals.

"Thee is too hard on Samuel Leake. He could not do otherwise, I think. Mark Watson's—— Oh, dear! my father's death made it necessary; but just how auntie didn't tell me."

"Why, as Mark's daughter his cabin and rat-traps would be yours," said Cæsar, scornfully. "You haven't asked for any advice yet, but to go live in that cabin isn't my idea while you've got Hutton Hall at your disposal. This, Miss Ethel, is my advice. Get the light cedar oars that I made over for you and go up the creek to Willow Bend and back. The tide's right, and what you need is out-door exercise. Go back to the

old days and make the birds crazy by laughing sweeter than they can sing."

"Why, Cæsar, what has got into thee? Thee has put every one of my thoughts out of my head. Thee always does."

"And I always mean to, when they're such notions as redden your eyes and take the color out of your cheeks. Just please don't bother about these matters. All the lawyers in the land can't make a Watson out of you after the schooling you've had at the Hall; and Miss Margaret will say the same thing."

"She has said it, Cæsar, but I don't believe it. I've got no boat; no anything but a new name, and what does it amount to?" And Ethel came very near to crying. She had come very near to overtaxing her nervous strength.

"If I am to be your friend, Miss Ethel, and perhaps your adviser and help in more ways than one, then you must not talk so. I am older than you by many years, and my life has been spent in a queer way. I am only a servant, I know, but one that can

be useful in a different way from ordinary help. You know this; and while you have not asked for one word of the advice you spoke about when you came out here, I have given you plenty and have more holdin' back. I've been keepin' my eyes open for you ever since that red wallet business, and intend to keep on doin' so. There's nobody can do you any harm, except yourself. That's all I'm afraid of. You fret about the name o' Watson. It's a good name while it's yours; but you're Ethel Hutton to everybody here, in spite of the lawyers; and your aunt will make it so, by issuin' orders to the servants, if it's necessary." Both laughed, and Ethel was beginning to feel the good effects of Cæsar's cheery chatter. He was right in many ways; she was convinced of that, but the rebellion in her blood was not subdued. Not a Hutton! Oh, it was a bitter thought! After a brief pause Cæsar resumed his little lecture: "After all, it is a big fuss about nothin'. It's just this. You're a Watson and your father, that you only knew by

sight, has been murdered; but you've been made, as your grandfather would 'a' had it, heir to the Hall if nobody turned up, and if he did——"

"There, there, Cæsar, don't bring that up again. He has turned up, as thee says, and I've no notion of standing in his way."

"There it is again. Worry, worry, worry. Take my advice and go get your boat——"

"His boat."

"*Your* boat; I made it for *you*," replied Cæsar, rather fiercely, "and take a row. I will be near the flood-gates, and if you get tired give the bird-call, and I'll row you back."

Ethel saw that her proper plan was to humor and not cross Cæsar, and there was no reason why she should not go, as he suggested. She knew from experience in part, but more from Cæsar's philosophy, that an hour with green leaves, a glance at rippling waters, or the song of a bird, all or one, was the true remedy for "blues." No doctor's nauseous mixture ever equalled it. Chase a butterfly or follow a squirrel as it

climbs a tree,—if you can,—for that sends the blood bounding in healthy fashion through the brain and dull care slinks out of sight. Melancholy is smothered by a merry laugh as surely as imps tremble before the sign of the cross.

"How I wish some mad-cap, like poor Archie Bartram, would come up for a few days!" Ethel said to herself, as she was nearing the landing; and then, with no apparent reason, she looked up and, looking, stood very still. The creek, the little wharf, the boats, were there as she expected to find them, but also, standing by her boat, the one she petted as if alive, was Ellwood Walter. She could not turn back. It was too late, as he had already seen her approaching. Nor could she stand there like a statue. She bit her lip, she patted the grass with one foot, and looked right and left in vain hopes that some one would pass by that she might join. No, there was but the one thing to do: to go on and deliberately get into another boat and proceed to Willow Bend.

"Well, the sky is bright blue and not a

cloud to be seen, and Cæsar says that is always lucky, but it is generally followed by a storm, I've noticed." And Ethel, saying this half aloud, took a few steps forward. Still, Mr. Walter did not look towards her, which she thought very strange, and to tell the truth it just a little piqued her. Why, indeed, had he not called at the house? When did he come to the neighborhood? Whom had he seen, that he made himself so free with her boat? And then the truth dawned upon her. He had seen Cæsar that morning, and that was why the cunning old Indian had suggested her going to Willow Bend; and then she thought of what else Cæsar had said, and she felt the blood coursing over her face. Go boating this morning? Never! And she turned homeward with a quick, decided step, but all too late.

"Miss Hutton," Mr. Walter called so clearly that she could not affect not to hear it. She must turn and reply to the call, and, doing so, saw Mr. Walter politely bow and draw near. Ethel did not move, and never

did vexing and peace-wrecking thoughts flash with such vividness through her brain. In a few seconds she lived a lifetime. How, as Ethel Hutton, she thought she would have brought this man to her feet if she had chosen, and then with fiendish delight, if she so felt, tossed him aside. How she would have walked as a queen under the old oaks —her oaks—of that sweet, sloping hill-side and granted royal permission to this man to use her boat,—and now, after a life-long dream, she had awakened to find herself Ethel Watson, who was doubtless welcome where she stood, but with no birth-given right. Did he know it? Would he recognize her as a Watson, and did he know himself to be a Hutton? If so, it was a most strange meeting.

Such were her thoughts as he drew near and plainly showed that he hoped for, if not expected, a friendly greeting. He glanced towards her hands, and Ethel could not resist extending one. Did he press her finger-tips ever so slightly more than was necessary? she wondered. At all events, he

was evidently delighted to see her, and she could not feel as sad as she supposed she should; but, after all,—and this did sober her,—it was merely playing Ethel Hutton, not being her. Did he know it? did he know it? kept ringing in her ears as if a crested titmouse in the tall trees was whistling that refrain this morning; and, worse than all,—how Ethel hated the bird!—a Carolina wren came very near, and fairly screeched at them *De-ceiv-er—De-ceiv-er*. Was the whole world in league against her? she wondered.

"Were you about to take a boat-ride this beautiful morning?" he asked.

"Unfortunate, if I was, seeing thee was about to take my boat," Ethel replied, with a show of spirit, her gayety returning in the nick of time.

"Oh, well; I'll relinquish it in your favor, of course."

"I should hope so, as it is my boat, and thee was about to go off with it when detected."

"Oh, not so bad as that. Your man, Cæsar, you call him, said I was welcome to

it, and I only thought to kill an hour or so before calling."

"Calling where?"

"Why, at the house, on you and your aunt. Where else could I go?"

"Well, my aunt"—the words sounded strangely to her now—"is not quite herself to-day and would ask to be excused, I think, but——"

"But you are here," said Mr. Walter, laughing heartily.

"Don't interrupt, please——"

"Couldn't help it. I beg your pardon; but you do not seem like a stranger, if I may be so plain spoken as to my feelings."

"Mr. Walter, I do not understand," Ethel replied, in a dignified way that put the young man on his guard at once.

"I beg pardon; but the fact is, Miss Hutton, that I do not feel away from home when the stage draws up at the Horse-Head."

"Thee feels at home, thee means, at a tavern," Ethel remarked a little saucily, and looking straight at him with her eyes wide open.

"Now, that is cruel. I mean, when in this neighborhood."

"Oh, then pardon me; but please tell me why thee feels so," asked Ethel, evincing a good deal of curiosity, which Mr. Walter made note of.

"I wish I knew," Mr. Walter replied; "but I have not forgotten that teaspoon incident for one thing. I have it with me."

"The incident or our spoon, which?"

"My spoon," replied Mr. Walter, slightly flushed, for he saw that Ethel was bent on teasing him; "and the incident is very fast in my memory. And, pardon me, but I have not forgotten you—and your aunt."

Ethel knew that Mr. Walter was watching her very closely, but she would not look up, and, after a moment's silence, remarked, "I shall not need my boat this morning. I prefer walking. Good-morning." And then turned away, as if to go home.

"One moment, please, Miss Hutton. Do you think your aunt would care to see the spoon?"

"Possibly she might; but may not I see it?" asked Ethel, really glad to resume the conversation.

"Oh, certainly." And Mr. Walter untied a little bundle that he took from his pocket and showed her a spoon in all respects like those at the house.

"And now, Miss Hutton, may I tell you a little of its story before you go?"

"I am quite willing to hear it, but would it not be more comfortable to be seated while thee tells it? There is a seat under the beech by the spring." And they walked towards it.

Ethel continued to hold the teaspoon and to look only at it while Mr. Walter was speaking.

"When I reached home," he began, "I brought up the subject of my childhood's history to my foster-father, but could gather little that was satisfactory to me. I could not get angry and insist. It would have been going backwards had I done so; but the adventure with your teaspoons greatly disturbed father when I told it. He was

convinced, I feel certain, that an accident, so to speak, had put me on the track of my identity, and he has been a changed man ever since. He is wealthy, as you may or may not know, and I am his only child, so to speak. To avoid disaster or the possibility of dispute by distant relatives, he has made me independent in his lifetime,—but all this is nothing." And Mr. Walter gave an impatient snap to his words that caused Ethel to look up and smile. He lost not a fraction of the time that smile played over her features. Resuming, he said, "My hobby is to determine who I am, and, do you know, I really believe the solving of that problem is only practicable here; right here at Hutton Hall."

"Why?" asked Ethel.

"That spoon leads me on——"

"To think of thy dinner?"

"Now, please, Miss Hutton, do not tease me. It is positively cruel."

"How?"

"Because I look to you for help to make out the puzzle. Let us solve the mystery

of the teaspoon, you and I together. It will be such fun."

"Will it?"

"Why not? Can you see any objection to our jointly undertaking so desirable a work as to prove nobody somebody?"

Ethel gave a start and drew herself together as if she would gladly disappear.

"Gracious, Miss Hutton, did my earnestness frighten you?"

"Not at all; but I am a little nervous, thee sees." And she laughed lightly, but not honestly. "Too much teaspoon of late."

Mr. Walter noticed her reserve and was curious about it, and yet knew there was no excuse now for making reference to it, except indirectly.

"I think," he said, "I've been suffering too with too much teaspoon; probably more than you have."

"Why?"

"Because it has made me more curious than ever about myself, and not in any way satisfied my curiosity. Who am I? who am I? rings all day in my ears.

Ethel flinched again, but kept herself more under control.

"What, Mr. Walter, does the spoon suggest to thee?"

"I asked my father—foster-father—if I could be your brother, and he said 'No' very emphatically."

"No, thee is not, Mr. Walter; guess again."

"Can it be the R. H. on the spoon means I am a Hutton?" And he looked at Ethel as he spoke.

She turned very pale, and then her cheeks burned. She recovered from her confusion in an instant and said, in a quick, nervous way, "Thee is Robert Hutton's son."

"Miss Hutton!" he exclaimed, standing in front of her, "do you think so? Does your aunt think so?"

"She thinks so too, and so does Cæsar."

"And you are——"

"Nobody." And Ethel rose from her seat and started towards the house.

Mr. Walter stepped in front of her, but she gave him one glance that checked his

words. He promptly stepped aside to let her pass, and as she did so stood watching her.

"I Robert Hutton's son and she 'nobody,'" Mr. Walter said to himself, and then, when Ethel was out of sight, followed in the same general direction, but to the Horse-Head Inn.

Chapter XII

Father and Son

From the same earth where foulest weeds make growth
Springs many a beauteous flower fair to see.

SAMUEL LEAKE was more puffed up than ever. Never had he had more business to look after, and here, most unusual for him, was a matter wrapped in mystery, full of vague suggestion and hinting of wrong. Deeds, mortgages, and other more peaceful matters had occupied his years. Never had he had a criminal to prosecute or defend. Seldom had he been called upon to address a jury. It was all counter to his taste. He loved his office, where he reigned and enjoyed the meek acceptance of all he said by those who called upon him. But now there was a change. He was involved, not in some knotty problem of vague law nor asked to argue the merits of a forced construction

upon plain common sense, but brought face to face with mystery, with probable murder, with endless contradictions, and, as always happens where men or women are brought together, considerable lying. Unintentional the last, of course; mere careless inaccuracy, if you choose, but what Cæsar Chesley called "lyin' for sake of its convenience at the time."

Samuel Leake was fairly choked by the magnitude of his importance at present. He cleared his throat so frequently and loudly, one naturally thought of distant thunder; and now his broad chest was fully expanded, and at last, after much time had been lost, he proceeded to consider the three communications he had received. They came together; left at his door the evening before, and were from, respectively, Margaret Forsythe, Ethel Watson (formerly Hutton), and Cæsar Chesley.

There was no mistaking their character. The first, in order, requested his presence in the coming week at Hutton Hall concerning rewriting Margaret Forsythe's will; the sec-

ond was a request that when he came to see her aunt he would oblige her by bringing all necessary papers bearing on her right, title, and interest to the late residence of her father, Mark Watson, in Bear Swamp, Nottingham; and then the last, much fuller than the others, a lengthy document from Cæsar Chesley, giving Mr. Leake a full and correct account of the history of Robert Hutton, so far as known to the writer; of his reasons for believing that Ethel Hutton is the daughter of Mark Watson, and further, from long knowledge of the family and familiarity with the generation to which Robert Hutton and Mrs. Margaret Forsythe belong, that the person who recently appeared at the Hall, on the pretence of desiring to purchase the same, calling himself Fretwell Farnsworth, is in reality the believed-to-be deceased Robert Hutton, and that he, Fretwell Farnsworth, now so called, is in possession of correct knowledge of Mark Watson's disappearance; and further, that a young gentleman that has recently been at Hutton Hall, and now staying at the Horse-Head

Inn, is a Hutton, and the son of Fretwell Farnsworth, or as he, Cæsar Chesley, believes, Robert Hutton; and finally, if made to confess, that Philip Flint, of Bear Swamp, could inform the world when and in what manner Mark Watson disappeared, and that, in conclusion, in his, Cæsar Chesley's, mind, there is no doubt but that Mark Watson was murdered.

"That man should have been a lawyer," Samuel Leake said to himself as he finished reading the letter; "but why has he never before communicated his knowledge, when it would have proved valuable? But it is in time now. And yet there is no suit pending; no question arisen between contending parties; nor, so far as these matters go, can there be. But this charge of murder, that I do not like."

Samuel Leake cleared his throat many times. He looked at the dingy ceiling and buried his nose in a bunch of lavender, and then proceeded to open an inkstand. Then he buried his nose in pennyroyal, and, taking up a quill, cut it with a flourish of hand and

elbow that seemed quite unnecessary, and with further gesticulation brought the pen-point to the paper and began writing. He was now really at work, and why all his preliminary gymnastics is a greater mystery than any he was called upon to solve. How remarkable it is that so many men make positive fools of themselves when alone, and delight in making asinine displays when in company! Samuel Leake was at work, and would have added another to the many papers in his pigeon-holes had not that evil genius of his, the huge brass knocker, sounded the death-knell of his quiet labors. Nobody to see the ladies ever knocked in that way. The tradesmen came in by the side-gate, if they came at all. That knock meant a caller upon himself, and Samuel Leake cleared his throat and waited.

The office door soon opened, and the grinning darky servant ushered in a young gentleman faultlessly dressed, of easy manners, and the equal, he saw at a glance, of any one he was likely to meet. The formal "Good-

mornings" were at once passed, and the visitor announced himself as Mr. Ellwood Walter, of Wilmington, and with business-like promptness a fee was placed in the lawyer's hands. So methodical was it all and so completely did Mr. Walter take the initiative, that Samuel Leake was just a little bewildered; it was so strange to take second place, and in his own office, too.

"I have called," remarked Mr. Walter, "to ask you a few questions, for one, as it seems to me, excellent reason. You are the counsel of Mrs. Forsythe, of Hutton Hall, and so, I presume, have it in your power to inform me, if not conflicting with your duties as her counsel, what I wish to know; first, who is Miss Ethel Watson, who declares of herself that she is 'nobody'? I quote her own word. Information on this point will probably throw some light upon a kindred question, who am I?"

Samuel Leake looked up with decided surprise in his face.

"I do not wonder at your astonishment, but while practically, and possibly perma-

nently, Ellwood Walter, I am also, it seems probable, some one else. To be very plain and unmistakable in my statements is, of course, necessary, and I can quickly clear your mind of any doubts as to my sanity." And Mr. Walter told the lawyer what the reader already knows.

Samuel Leake looked at the ceiling, at his desk and table, buried his nose in lavender, and cleared his throat.

"Mr. Walter," he remarked, solemnly, "I am puzzled——"

"So am I," interrupted Mr. Walter.

"I am puzzled as to what stand to take in this matter; of course, my duty necessitates taking care of Mrs. Forsythe's interests."

"I do not suppose the information I seek jeopardizes them. If so, please leave my question unanswered."

"Ah, Mr. Walter, thank you, thank you! This relieves me at once of some embarrassment."

"My only wish is to clear away all doubt as to my origin. If I am Robert Hutton, grandson of the late Edmund Hutton, and

so a nephew of Mrs. Forsythe, I should be delighted to know it. She is a charming woman, and would make for me, I hope, what I have never had, a delightful aunt, and Miss Hutton or Watson——" Here Mr. Walter hesitated, hoping Mr. Leake would take up the conversation; but the old lawyer was wide awake to-day, and too cunning to be trapped. He wanted Mr. Walter to do all the talking, for a while at least; so he said merely,—

"Miss Hutton or Watson—well?"

"There, Mr. Leake," Mr. Walter continued, "I am at a loss to see things satisfactorily. Naturally, my means of acquiring information have been very limited; mostly what the young lady has herself told me. If, as I have been informed, she is really the daughter of this missing Mark Watson, how came she to be known as Miss Hutton and the supposed daughter of my supposed father? Really, if somebody else, I should be disposed to laugh."

"Just so, just so, Mr. Walter; just so." And Samuel Leake with unusual vigor

cleared his throat and buried his nose alternately in lavender and pennyroyal, and then said, "There is no longer any question as to Miss Hutton's or Watson's identity. She was, it appears, placed in your grandfather's hands as his grandchild, and you, as you know, were adopted, as the result of a purchase, or money paid by——"

"Captain Walter, of Wilmington."

"Ah, yes, Captain Walter, of Wilmington; and now after all these years, by providential interference, shall we say, you discover your identity through——"

"A teaspoon."

"A teaspoon," repeated Samuel Leake mechanically, and his solemn manner came very nearly being made a farcical one.

"Yes, sir, a teaspoon. I supposed you knew the particulars."

"I do, I do," Mr. Leake replied.

"And now, Mr. Leake, may I ask, are you satisfied with the evidence as it stands of my identity?"

"My judgment is altogether in its favor, but I must say in this connection, of course,

that it does not, indeed, can not, affect Mrs. Forsythe's possession of Hutton Hall."

"Oh, bother all such matters!" exclaimed Mr. Walter, impatiently; "I dislike to speak of myself, but such a question as property never entered my head. I have no need of additional wealth, I am happy to say, and would only accept such as I could earn if I was."

"Just so, just so; you are evidently a man of means, and your sole purpose that which you mentioned at the beginning of this consultation. You can, of course, prove your identity as formerly Mr. Ellwood Walter, I presume——"

"Oh, yes, there's no doubt of that. My foster-father is very well known in Wilmington. His wealth makes him that unavoidably, but he is not disposed to thrust himself upon public notice."

"Just so, just so; and now for convenience' sake I will address you as Mr. Walter still, although I wish to bring up the career, as far as known, of your actual father. It seems really providential that you should

have called, and to-day,—really providential, for I have before me a communication from one Cæsar Chesley, the confidential farm manager of Mrs. Forsythe, relating to him; and what fairly staggers me, so providential does it seem, a Mr. Fretwell Farnsworth is to call here almost at any minute, and the purport of the communication from Cæsar Chesley—a most intelligent and sober man—is that Mr. Farnsworth, now of Philadelphia, is, in fact, the supposed-to-be deceased Robert Hutton, and so——"

"My father?"

Bang! bang! bang!

"The same, and that knock at the door probably announces his arrival. Please, therefore, retire to this adjoining room and stay until called. The door will stay ajar and you may listen." And Samuel Leake hurried Mr. Walter from the office and almost closed the door that opened into his parlor. This was scarcely done before Fretwell Farnsworth entered the dingy room and occupied without formality the very chair in which his son had been sitting.

The old lawyer, who was now in a positive fever of multiplied emotions, and so thoroughly roused from the sleepy effects of lavender, of pennyroyal, and parchment that he was scarcely in condition to give a calm hearing to any one on any subject, and he was quite unaware of the nature of Mr. Farnsworth's business. It was with a sense of resignation to the inevitable that he sank back into his easy-chair and said, in a half-hearted way, "Well, Mr. Farnsworth, what, may I ask, is the nature of your business?"

"To tell you the truth, you seem quite incompetent to rationally consider any business; my sudden entrance seems to have upset you?"

"Not at all, sir; not at all. I have been deeply engaged and am sorely puzzled. Pray continue with your business."

"It is legal; strictly legal, Mr. Leake; and I wish it despatched with that celerity for which you are noted," said Mr. Farnsworth, rather haughtily.

Samuel Leake sat bolt-upright, faced his

client with a smiling countenance, if a "sour grin," as some one called it, can be called by so pleasant a word as smiling, and then plunged his nose into lavender and cleared his throat.

"I desire to know, Mr. Leake, if, in your opinion, the present occupant and owner, I presume, of Hutton Hall could be induced to part with it?"

"Undoubtedly not, sir; undoubtedly not, sir. I know, as her counsel, I can speak positively on that subject. You were assured of this, I believe, when you were at the Hall."

"Yes; but I thought possibly the matter might have been reconsidered favorably to my suggestion."

"No, sir; there has been no change of purpose. Mrs. Forsythe and her niece——"

"Beg pardon; but did I understand you to say 'her niece'?"

"You did, sir, you did. Miss Hutton, daughter of the late Robert Hutton——"

"Yes, I see," remarked Mr. Farnsworth; "but I believe I informed you that Mr. Hutton was still living."

"True, you did; but the evidence of his death seemed satisfactory to his father, and his will was made accordingly and since acted upon, leaving Mrs. Forsythe in undisturbed possession."

"Oh, Mr. Hutton will never return. He has no desire to annoy his sister in any way, and as I cannot possess myself of it by purchase, the matter must rest; but Mr. Hutton never spoke of a daughter. My impression is his only child was a son."

Samuel Leake was to be pitied. Here was a superb chance to do a brilliant piece of work, yet he was helpless. He did not know what to say or in what direction to turn the conversation. First of all, he was anxious for what criminating information he could get, not to fix it upon the man before him, but to set at rest the many questions that now disturbed the peace of Hutton Hall. What Mr. Farnsworth really was, as well as who he was, did not concern Mr. Leake outside of this. There was not sufficient evidence to convict him at hand, and he was in no position to retain him, had he

so desired. Mr. Farnsworth might be, for all he knew, a walking arsenal. His interests all lie in treating him as a gentleman.

"As I was instrumental, and solely so, in Mark Watson's sudden return to the West Indies, and am myself about to return, possibly permanently, my other purpose in calling was to arrange about the care of his cottage and grounds."

Here was Samuel Leake's chance, and he saw it. His mind was very clear on that point.

"There, Mr. Farnsworth, is where I wish to consult you. The late, or absent, Mark Watson left me certain papers some time ago, and I was to act according to my own judgment in case of his death. I have been assured only to-day that Mark was murdered, and your statement called in question."

"Absurd; what do the Horse-Head people know?" replied Mr. Farnsworth, contemptuously.

"Not so, not so; the neighbors of the missing man have their suspicions."

"Suspicions!" cried Fretwell Farnsworth. And he rose quickly from his chair.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Farnsworth. I said suspicions that he was made away with. This is peculiarly the view of Cæsar Chesley."

"Of whom?"

"Of Cæsar Chesley; who was not murdered by Robert Hutton, and is now and has been for years dwelling at Hutton Hall. This man believes that Mark Watson was murdered, and, further, that Robert Hutton is still living, but not in the West Indies."

"Where, then?" asked Fretwell Farnsworth, pale as a ghost.

"Of late in Philadelphia, and if Mr. Chesley were present he would add, and now in this room."

"What do you mean, sir? That I am Robert Hutton?"

"Precisely, precisely; pray be seated. We may all be laboring under a mistake, but I am interested in this matter."

"Not more than I." And saying this, Fretwell Farnsworth drew from his coat a long knife and remarked, "No harm, sir, if you remain seated while I retire." And he took a step backward. As he did so, the

sound of an opening door attracted his attention, and Ellwood Walter stepped into the room. He was very pale, and trembling, but made no remark. Now that they were face to face, the relationship could not be doubted. In an instant the knife dropped from Farnsworth's hand and he exclaimed, in a strange, hoarse voice, "My son!"

"And is it possible that I have searched all these years only to find my father a murderer!" And Ellwood Walter sank into a chair and rested his head violently upon Samuel Leake's desk.

The slight interruption caused by his son's words and movements was Farnsworth's opportunity. He turned and rushed from the house. To untie his saddled horse was but the work of a moment, and when the lawyer and his client reached the door, Farnsworth was riding at full gallop up the street, and was straightway lost to sight at the bend of the highway.

Samuel Leake and Ellwood Walter returned directly to the office, each occupied

with his thoughts, and very painful ones they were. At last, Mr. Walter looked up and said, with much emotion, "There is no longer any doubt, but I prefer, I think, to remain Ellwood Walter."

"I am not surprised, Mr. Walter, I am not surprised; and yet it may not be the best thing after all. There are possible contingencies that might make it desirable to take the name of Hutton."

"Why, why, why, Mr. Leake, should he have done it?" asked Ellwood Walter, greatly agitated.

"Because he sold *you* and put *her* in your place. It has crazed him, and we can almost pity rather than condemn."

"Thank you, thank you, for apologizing for my poor father." And Ellwood Walter almost broke down. "Does she know this?" he asked, after a painful pause. "Know that my father killed hers?"

"I presume she does; indeed, I know she does."

"Then I must see her at once," he said, excitedly, and almost abruptly he left the room.

Chapter XIII

Readjustment

At last! What wealth of meaning in the words!
  How sweet to weary hearts to say, "at last"!
To see the sunshine, hear again the birds;
  To know the clouds, the sorrow, all have passed!

Ellwood Walter, all that night, was not literally torn by conflicting emotions, but was exceedingly harassed by them. He had reached the Horse-Head late in the afternoon and could eat no supper. He was restless beyond description, and should he or should he not call at the Huttons', swayed him to and fro like a pendulum; and when it was too late to act upon it, had he concluded to go, he wisely said to himself, "I'll wait till morning," and retired with the result mentioned. Certainly he had had no restorative sleep, and was pale, careworn, and not at all interesting-looking when he came down in the morning to breakfast. He had

dressed himself with the usual care, however, and forced himself to pleasantness as best he could. "It is my last day at the Horse-Head, it may be, and I mean to make the most of it," he said to himself, and started slowly towards Hutton Hall. It was yet too early in the morning to present himself; so he thought of the creek, which to him had become exceedingly attractive, and pictured to himself the seat at the foot of the beech-tree and "nobody" sitting there. "'Nobody,'" he said aloud; "if she is 'nobody,' then what must the somebodies be like? I've never seen any." And he whirled through the air the switch that he carried so swiftly that its swish was like a suppressed scream. "That's it; cry out, little stick, as you dash along. I feel like doing the same thing. What a queer turn of affairs in the past few days! Worked like sin to find out who I am, and now it proves I'd better have stayed in ignorance. No, no; I'll take that back, every word of it. It ended in my meeting her, 'nobody'; and isn't it funny I'd been calling myself that?"

Ellwood Walter tarried awhile at the beech-tree seat, then wandered to the boats and back again to the seat, and finally, giving himself a general shake, exclaimed, "Hang it! early or late, I'm going." And taking a roundabout course, that he might appear to have come directly from the Horse-Head, he boldly marched to the front-door and knocked. The sound that followed was that of calling aloud in an empty room; a loud, hollow sound that might awaken ghosts, but not call up a living soul. Is no one about? Is the house deserted? he wondered; but it all proved a trick of his feverish doubts. The door opened, and Cynthia, looking very sober,—so he thought,—showed him to the parlor. But one window had been opened and the solid shutters were nearly closed in: never, he thought, was a room more dismal; and how chilly, too! though it was warm as summer out-of-doors. "No use, I guess," he muttered to himself; "luck's against me, and I feel I'm a *persona non grata*, and had better have gone home instead of come here."

He stood in the light that came through the one opened window and feebly held back the surrounding gloom; and looking towards the open door heard, in the hall, approaching footsteps. He had asked for Miss Hutton, and Mrs. Margaret Forsythe appeared. "That's not favorable," he said to himself.

"Good-morning, Mr. Walter," Margaret said, in a cheerful way that was in a measure reassuring; "I am glad thee came."

"That is very kind of you, Mrs. Forsythe; for I felt as if I must visit the place just once more before returning home." And the emphasis on the words "place" and "home" came to him in spite of all his efforts. Did she notice it? he wondered.

"I am glad thee came, for I wished to see thee, and had sent a note to that effect to the inn. Did thee not get it?"

"I did not. I left there some time ago and have been walking about for——"

"Thy health?" asked Margaret, her face lighting up very much as she did so.

"Well, not exactly; but I did not care

to sit still on the tavern porch for two or three hours."

"Very natural, I suppose," replied Margaret. And then, after a moment's hesitation, during which time Mr. Walter wondered what had become of Miss Hutton, or Watson, or "nobody," she continued, "Has thee determined to make any changes in thy life's plans in consequence of the strange discoveries that have so unsettled all of us?" And Margaret looked very much relieved when she finished her long speech, as she thought it.

"In what way, may I ask?"

"As thee was born a Hutton, but has lived all these years a Walter, will thee continue as the latter or assume the other name?"

"I have my preferences in the matter, certainly, but do not know how far I can act. I must consult with my father, my foster-father, of course, and possibly the law."

"Yes," replied Margaret, thoughtfully; "really, I had not thought what the change

really meant, and supposed the consulting need not go outside of thyself. How foolish in me!"

"Oh, I think it would be imperative to have the matter settled according to the laws governing such a matter. There would arise certain complications and entanglements about property; but whatever the cost or trouble, I wish to be a Hutton."

"Let me ask, please, why thee wishes it?" And Margaret looked, as she was speaking, very intently at him.

"How could I do otherwise when it would give me yourself as my aunt?" And Mr. Walter made a very low but graceful bow.

Margaret Forsythe held out her hand, which Mr. Walter took eagerly, and while he held it she said, "I accept thee as my nephew and welcome thee as a Hutton to our home. Thee is Robert Hutton now, to me, whatever the law decides."

"Hang the law! Aunt Margaret,"—how funny it sounded to them!—"I'm a Hutton

if it costs everything. Do tell me where Miss Ethel happens to be."

"There," said Aunt Margaret, laughing, "thee shows thy Hutton blood: so fearfully impatient."

A shadow crossed the door-sill and the rustling of a dress was heard. Looking up, Margaret and her nephew saw Ethel at the door.

"May I come in?" she asked. And never were words more musical to a young man's ears.

"Yes, dear," replied her aunt; "this is thy cousin, Robert Hutton."

"Good-morning, Mr. Walter," Ethel said, holding out her hand; and turning to Margaret as she did so, added, "My cousin? how? I have no relations."

Did she not notice that all the while she was talking to her aunt this bold young man retained his hold upon her hand. Was the sudden discovery of the fact real?

"Miss Ethel," he said——

"Excuse me for the moment," remarked Margaret, and quickly left the room.

"Miss Ethel, your aunt has urged me—though I did not need it—to resume the name of Hutton, to which I have a birthright; and may I now have the honor and pleasure of offering that name to you?"

"Mr. Walter!"

"No, Ethel, I am not Mr. Walter, but Robert Hutton. Will you not, my darling, call me Robert?"

"Robert," she whispered, without looking up.

Late in the day the one-time Ellwood Walter found Cæsar Chesley sitting in the woodshed enjoying a contemplative smoke. As he approached the old man, the pipe was laid aside and he arose and offered Mr. Walter his hand, saying, "I've been waiting to see you. I felt sure you were a Hutton when I first laid eyes on you." Then, seeing that Ethel was approaching, he lowered his voice and added, "Let me say now, that you're the luckiest of them all. What I've heard to-day makes me feel as young as this century is new."

"Cæsar," said Ethel, when she came up to them, "there wasn't much fun in the game of 'Nobody, or who's who'; but it's turned out all right I guess."

"You guess, Miss Ethel; well, I know it has," replied Cæsar.

"And I hope it has," added Robert Hutton.

THE END.

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